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MODERN SCOTTISH WRITERS

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W. M. PARKER

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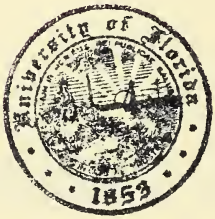

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Preface

IN bringing together the following papers, my object has been to direct attention to the merits of some modern Scottish writers. So far as I am aware, no book has been devoted entirely to these representative men. The significance of their personalities as well as of their works I have endeavoured to emphasise in a manner clear enough, I hope, to incite a renewed interest in them. One or two writers are excluded for the reason that they are not modern in outlook; some have been left out of account, either because their reputations are not firmly established, or their works are not of sufficient importance to warrant consideration. These studies make no claim to be comprehensive, but perhaps they may convey an indication of what the authors and their works stand for. It will be seen that my aim has been variety, rather than uniformity, of

treatment. As a rule, the books chosen for criticism are of a purely literary nature, so, if any reader should be surprised that a particular book has been neglected, it is hoped he will accept this explanation.

I must thank the editor of *The Scots Pictorial* for his kindness in allowing me to republish these papers, which appeared originally in that journal.

W. M. P.

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I

The Literary Side of Andrew Lang

Andrew Lang

INSTINCTIVELY and consciously we have been forced by the war to think of our national expression in literature. We have been brought to a point where we find it is almost imperative to re-value some of our representative national writers. During the last eighteen months or so it has been an increasing pleasure for me to re-read or to make a first acquaintance with some of Andrew Lang's literary works. In a short article much that concerns so versatile a writer must remain unconsidered. It would be an impossible feat to review in full Lang's many-sided powers, so I have chosen to dwell on his literary side only.

One of the Border breed, Lang was

born in Selkirk on 31st March, 1844. Briefly, his distinguished career covers four periods — as a schoolboy at Edinburgh Academy, as a student at St. Andrews University, and later at Balliol College, Oxford, where he took a classical first-class, becoming a Fellow of Merton College in 1868, and, finally, as a journalist and author in London. In 1888 he was the first Gifford lecturer at St. Andrews, and latterly academic distinctions were conferred upon him.

Of his early life he gives some personal touches in one of his books. "I myself," he writes, "according to my class master, was a 'bad and careless little boy' at thirteen, incurably idle, but I well remember reading in Ovid and Cæsar and Sallust. . . . Some foolish person went seeking early

anecdotes of myself at my native town, Selkirk. . . . About me the inquiring literary snipe only heard that 'Andra was aye the stupid ane o' the fam'ly.'" But, if these remarks be true, we can say in opposition to them, and with absolute certainty, that in after-life he more than made up for the idleness and stupidity of his boyhood. From Oxford he gained a personal manner that was prevalent there in the days when Matthew Arnold was the idol of many an undergraduate. This angular Scotsman, with a keen taste for golf and fishing, had acquired the style so thoroughly that, I have heard, it remained with him throughout his life. It is common knowledge that his handwriting was distinguished for its illegibility, and specimens of it are still sought after. A

well-known writer has paid tribute to him as a charming letter-writer. In London he became a brilliant journalist, reviewing for the *Academy* along with Saintsbury, Henley, Mandell Creighton, and Wedmore. He was attached to *Longman's Magazine*, to which he contributed monthly topical paragraphs under the title, "At the Sign of the Ship." Reading through these pages nowadays his views sound ephemeral and dated; characteristic of his angling point-of-view is the sentence where he exclaims, "How pleasant it would be to see big four-pounders rising under the willows on the Serpentine in the sunsets of June!" If the lure of journalism, the ticking-off articles and reviews, had not been so potent, it is easily conceivable that with

more time for concentration Lang might have produced a really great masterpiece.

In an earlier age Lang would have been considered "a coortly makar" (courtly poet). He is a light poet of the first rank, and has at his finger tips the ingenuity and grace necessary for *vers de société*, and in the writing of that special medium there is only one present-day poet who shares them with him in a like degree —Mr. Austin Dobson. He trifles with the muse, though he trifles to some purpose. He never attempts to soar to the great heights; but in poetry there are many mansions, and it is futile to carp at Lang's muse because she inhabits a lowly chamber in the temple of Euterpe where she can best sing her simple lays; it would be as senseless for an alleged lover of music

to overlook Mozart's simple, flute-like melodies. About 1870, Mr. Thomas Seccombe remarks, the British Museum was then and "for some time after a nest of singing birds." The circle included Patmore, O'Shaughnessy, Garnett, Dobson, Gosse and Lang. "The study of French literature was in the air," and these minor poets were inspired to write in French forms of verse, ballades, rondeaus, chants royal, rondels, triolets and villanelles. Lang's first venture was "Ballads and Lyrics of Old France," in 1872, which was followed intermittently by other volumes of verse till 1888. The "Ballad of the Tweed" and "St. Andrews Bay" illustrate how nobly and tenderly he could voice the praise of and the feeling for his native land. Other notable poems in

his "Ballades and Rhymes" are "To Theocritus, in Winter," "Of the Summer Term," "Of Blue China," "Of Aucassin," "Of Queen Anne," "The Odyssey" with its magical last line, "Almæ Matres," the wonderful "Ballade of Summer" with its catching refrain—"When fans for a penny are sold in the Strand!"—and "Homeric Unity." They are all full of glamour, wit, and a certain sweet piquancy that are beyond description. In 1888 "Grass of Parnassus" was published. It contains some gems in the lyric strain, such as the romantic "Twilight on Tweed," concluding with its haunting coda of

> "Twilight, and Tweed, and Eildon Hill,
> Fair and too fair you be;
> You tell me that the voice is still
> That should have welcomed me;"

also "A Sunset on Yarrow," tinged with

sadness; a faint echo of Swinburne in "A Song of Phæacia"; and the exquisite "Good-Bye" and "A Dream."

The popularity of "New and Old Letters to Dead Authors" is not without reason. As a collection of letters to celebrities of past ages expressed with perfect taste and in a charming style, it is a complete *tour de force*. Special mention should be made of the letters to Ronsard, Thackeray, and Theocritus, the last a luxuriant prose poem full of colour and rich imagination. The one to Byron, written in verse, is particularly worthy of notice on account of its stinging satire on those poets who depreciate Byron in a sort of supercilious way—

> ". . . Byron's style is 'jolter-headed jargon';
> His verse is 'only bearable in prose.'
> So living poets write of those that *are* gone,
> And o'er the Eagle thus the Bantam crows.

In one letter, obviously referring to St. Andrews and the Borders, Lang writes, "Beautiful is Italy, her seas, and her suns: but dearer to me the long grey wave that bites the rock below the minster in the north; dearer are the barren moor and black peat-water swirling in tawny foam, and the scent of bog myrtle and the bloom of heather; and, watching over the lochs, the green round-shouldered hills." In 1889 came "Letters on Literature," not quite so uniformly excellent, but some of which are valuable. For instance, he makes out very wisely that no one who cares for books can afford to neglect Fielding. I was surprised and glad when reading through this book to come upon Lang's early recognition of our present Poet Laureate. Bridges's poetry, he points

out, possesses "a certain austere and indifferent beauty of diction and a memory of the old English poets." His letter on Virgil is inspired by dignity and grace. This book was followed the next year by "Old Friends," a volume that hails him as one of our supreme parodists. Letters from Mr. Clive Newcome to Mr. Arthur Pendennis, from Mrs. Proudie to Mr. Quiverful, from Jonathan Oldbuck, Esq., Monkbarns, to Robert Surtees, Esq., Mainsforth, from Piscator to Christian, from Sir Amyas Leigh to Euphues, and from Mr. Pickwick to the Count Fosco, are written in the manner of speech that each character would employ in corresponding with the other. Seaman has scarcely excelled this achievement in parody.

We are told by some persons that it is as an essayist that Lang's reputation will last. Certainly his "Essays in Little" are uncommonly vigorous criticism. We would refer readers of this book to the generous praise bestowed upon Homer, Scott, Dumas, Theodore de Banville, Thackeray, and Stevenson, and to the enthusiasm for the Sagas. Homer was "so full of love of life and all things living, so rich in all human sympathies, so readily moved . . . and with all this delight in the real, Homer is the most romantic of poets." Lang is liberal in his praise of the Flodden Fight in "Marmion." In Dumas, he writes, "you hear his manly laughter, you hear his mighty hands approving, you see the tears he sheds when he had slain Por-

thos." Lang comments on Thackeray's "unmatched and inimitable style, . . . his charm, his humour, his eloquence, his tenderness." I agree when he concludes that Dickens never surpassed "Pickwick."

Probably Lang's nearest approach to a masterpiece is his two-volume "Life of John Gibson Lockhart," the authorised biography of Scott's famous son-in-law. In it he asserts that "To a Scot, and a Scot of the Border, the book [Lockhart's "Life of Scott"] has the charm of home, and is dear to us as his own grey hills were dear to Sir Walter." In spite of language that is graceful in the main, certain inelegancies creep into Lang's style, such as the ugly word "unfriend," which appears in his introduction to "Selected Poems of Burns" and in his

"Sir Walter Scott." In his commentary on Burns's character there is a delicate poetic passage that refers to the poet's conduct. "For a song Burns sold his life; all ends in song. . . . The poet is dead, and dead are the fair ladies and the pretty wenches . . . the girl who drank the bottle of cider, and many another lass, named and unnamed, in the chronicle of his heart. The cider is drunk out, the lips that kissed, the hearts that broke, are dust; only the songs survive." He compares certain lines by Burns to the lyrics of Catullus "for direct and intense energy, . . . and his rural pictures may be compared to the best idylls of Theocritus in everything but that perfect beauty only attainable by a Greek." He justly singles out

"Ae fond kiss," which has always appealed to me as Burns's most perfect lyric. Lang's "Scott" is a useful book for those who have not the time or the will-power to attack *the* Life. One or two of his summaries are unerring; for example, that "the Shirra's" mind turned towards the past in order to find an explanation of the present; that he was an improviser rather than a self-conscious artist; and that "of love as of human life he knew too much to speak." Lang had the good fortune to receive all Scott's poems by Mrs. Laidlaw's bequest. He is rather harsh on "The Lord of the Isles," which, to my mind, has considerable qualities to recommend it. The outline of the novels reveals a mind that has been steeped in the atmosphere that permeates them,

and his appreciation, if critical, is not wanting in warmth.

Intensely in sympathy with the romantic school, Lang's preferences in criticism are for "elfin chivalry," whether it be in the Greek and old French romances, in the Sagas, in the Border Ballads, or in Scott's poems. Outside of that province his literary taste is severely selective. He abhors realism and the methods of the realistic school. Mr. Gosse would have us believe that his romantic sympathies led him away from a familiar contact with life. His attitude towards particular controversial subjects is curiously prejudiced —that is perhaps his greatest weakness. His views, at certain times, are rather emphatically advocated. He is a serious rival to Dr. Saintsbury in thwacking

present-day literary taste and exhorting it to turn to the nobler works that have something of the sanctifying seal of time upon them. As a scholar he makes too much of some pedantic points. He rarely uses empty phrases that have no meaning attached to them, and his enthusiasms are whole-hearted if he does not sometimes, as is the case with Homer and Theocritus, ride them a trifle too hard. There is something of the tricksy fay in him, and he has always a peculiarly light touch that defies analysis and refreshes the jaded mind, as in his sketch of Socrates on the links in "Golfing Sketches." The late Dr. Whitehouse, the Hebrew scholar, was noted for his passion for accuracy; Lang was an outstanding scholar, though time and again, as the tussles with Dr. Hay

Fleming on historical facts testify, he could fling himself wide of the mark. He tackled the Shakespeare-Bacon question in his "Shakespeare, Bacon, and the Great Unknown," and made "forcible replies," as Sir Sidney Lee maintains, "to Mr. Greenwood's attack." Some readers are no doubt aware that he has edited one of the "Notable English Trials" Series.*

Lang's romantic qualities, while they are opposed to realism, have curiously enough subsisted side by side with the firmly-rooted classical background of his mind. His inclinations run on classical lines, and he is naturally most successful where the classics are concerned. A

* "The Annesley Case." Edited, with Introduction and Appendix, by Andrew Lang. Illustrated. *Notable English Trials.* Wm. Hodge & Co., 1912.

certain reviewer once spoke of a "happy band of scholars which is able to talk quite genially to an ordinary well-read person without making him feel uncomfortably ignorant and perplexed. Andrew Lang was one of them, and Professor Gilbert Murray is another." "As a translator from the classical poets," says Sir George Douglas, "Mr. Lang's perfect art has probably never been equalled in our literature." One can look upon this as a true verdict after dipping into the translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey. For grace, restraint, and beauty of form, for sheer loveliness of phrase, and as an understanding picture of the times, surely the introductions to the translations of "Theocritus" and of "Aucassin and Nicolete" stand out entirely alone from their kind.

The last won the warm praises of Walter Pater, who regarded it as a poet s translation. Aucassin and Nicolete, with their entrancing eyes of "vair" (slightly grey?), lips like damask roses, golden hair, and milk-white feet, flit over the gleaming dew in the clear moonshine under shivering boughs, when all the listening summer night is perfumed with the sweetness of innocent passion. Naïve must be the song-story that tells of these simple lovers, and such indeed it is. Lang has found his way without difficulty to the heart of this tender romance. The picture of Nicolete seeking for her lover, who has been thrown into prison, is fashioned with a delicate skill. An equally matchless performance is the translation of Theocritus. These idylls must win the

affections of every admirer of classic beauty and culture. The soothing pastoral landscape with its ambrosial airs, the simple, homely talk of the herds, the divine dirges, the psalm of Adonis in the renowned fifteenth idyll, are luscious fruits for our whetted palate. We hear the hushed voice chanting the Song of Lycidas, or that of passionate anguish crying out for sips of nectar by the soft-lapping waves of the Sicilian coast. A style, chaste and serene, enthralls us by its charm, and it seems to laugh out at us from the pages in accord with the flood of sunshine that bathes the happy soul of this ancient lyric poet.

Lang's ready capacity for hard work was at last arrested, and he died at Banchory on 20th July, 1912. Surveying his literary output as a whole, I am inclined to think

that "Dear Andrew with the brindled hair" has been grossly underrated. An author of such varied interests—literature, history, science, philosophy, primitive religions, sport—scarcely deserves this neglect. As a parody on him has it—

"You ask me, Fresher, who it is
Who rhymes, researches, and reviews,
Who somtimes writes like Genesis
And sometimes for the 'Daily News,'
Who jests in words the angels use,
And is most solemn with most slang;
Who's who, who's which, and which is whose
Who can it be but Andrew Lang?

"Quips, quirks are his, and quiddities,
The epic and the tea-cup muse,
Bookbindings, aborigines,
Ballads that banish all the Blues,
Young married life among Yahoos,
An Iliad, and Orang-outang,
Triolet, Totems, and Tattoos,
Who can it be but Andrew Lang?"

There are strong Scottish characteristics in his works which, bearing upon the present time of war, represent an expression

of our national soul. It was fitting that to the memory of this gifted Scotsman there should be set up a memorial in the Selkirk Free Library. His romantic ideal was a hard and exacting ideal that demanded unceasing labour from its pursuer. His was a life devoted to covering sheaves of manuscript pages with a willing and tireless pen. Our admiration for him might be couched in the style of a past age—He was a man of a mind so finely tempered and of such ripe wisdom that I well believe I shall ever hold him in goodly esteem for these self-same virtues.

II.

A Romantic Vagabond

Robert Louis Stevenson

IN the cradle of their young days Edinburgh has mothered many illustrious Scotsmen—the honest Allan Ramsay, the dissolute Robert Fergusson, the redoubtable Sir Walter Scott, the prejudiced Lord Jeffrey, the incongruous Robert Louis Stevenson. For a quite considerable period of his life Stevenson was embosomed among the romantic Pentland Hills; though he might travel to the uttermost parts of the earth, many a time and oft he must have looked back fondly to the glamorous atmosphere of his early youth. But there came a time, as we shall see, when Stevenson found out that for the sake of his art, as well as of his health, he must desert that homing instinct,

he must suppress the nostalgia, subdue it, thwart it, yet allow it not to be entirely extinguished; and he discovered that for a while he must needs turn to a foreign clime which, though remote, proved to be every whit as romantic as the familiar one of his youth.

Stevenson is a narrator of romance as distinguished from a pure novelist, and his happy gift vents itself in adventure and terror and gallantry, the mainstays of romance proper. He arouses interest and holds the attention with no indefinite grip; once held, you are held spellbound, enthralled. The ludicrous situations, the fantasies, and the eccentricities of "New Arabian Nights" are a delight, at least in the best of the stories—in the inimitable "Suicide Club" and "The Rajah's

Diamond," with their clever insinuations, their display of artfully selected detail, with wit grotesquely allied to the horrible. The secrecy and pomposity of the Club coterie and the sense of mystery in the Diamond episodes are presented to our mind's eye from a teeming imagination, bathed in an atmosphere of which the rich reality outshines in only a few degrees the half-dream quality. The deliberation of action in "The Pavilion on the Links" leaves an unfavourable impression. The thread of the plot is so unconvincing, the cunning of story-telling so low-pitched that failure is inevitable. "A Lodging for the Night" is remarkable solely for its vivid picture of Villon "roughing it" in snow-bound Paris. For a short romantic incident the narrative and dramatic powers in "The

Sire de Malétroit's Door" show finished art. The charm of Blanche mingles with the debonair, heroic mien of Denis in the sweet mood of this tale. Denis's cavalier swagger, with its dash of bravado, stands him in good stead. These stories are founded mostly upon a fantastic or improbable basis that acts as a fuse to set fire to the train of ensuing events, which are told in a manner of natural spontaneity, colouring the story with the varnish of seeming truth. One can always read that incomparable romance of adventure, "Treasure Island," with increased relish each time. The boy who has read "Treasure Island" and cannot revel in it or be thrilled by it must be obviously either an incorrigible prig or an ignoble dullard. Fortunately, Time has pronounced his

benediction upon both this book and "Kidnapped," and they stand on the shelves of the classics cheek by jowl with "The Antiquary" and "Henry Esmond." Alan Breck is a masterpiece of character-creation. Surely the great quarrel scene between him and David Balfour has by now become too famous to require any meed of praise further than that which has already been so deservedly bestowed. To criminal psychology Stevenson directed his undivided attention, and his interest in it bore ripe fruit in the successes of "The Dynamiter" and "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," the latter title having become a proverbial household reference to moral problems. "Prince Otto" is too artificial to please many lovers of R. L. S., in spite of the supposition that it is a true test of

the genuine Stevensonian. The heroine, Seraphina, redeems in part the colourless surroundings of the hero, the victim of intriguing parties in the unsettled state of Grünewald, and a type of weak man that Stevenson profoundly loathed. Another stumbling-block to the success of "Prince Otto" is the introduction of dry politics with a too great fund of dialectics—a theme generally presenting unusual difficulties to the best of novelists. The far-famed "Master of Ballantrae" is too familiar to need any re-introduction in a short article. Its superb thrill and its descriptive powers can never die. In his last and unfinished work, "Weir of Hermiston," he has based his chief character on the eminent "Hanging Judge," Lord Braxfield. The elder Kirstie Elliott,

a marvellous creation of middle-aged womanhood, is a close rival to him in the important part she plays in this masterly fragment. The story is a blend of Emily Brontë and George Douglas Brown with a considerable infusion of Stevenson's own individuality. The Lord Justice-Clerk, an object of dread with a forbidding aspect, is like a mixture of Heathcliffe and Gourlay. No doubt while Stevenson was picturing the Scottish lowland landscape at Hermiston and Cauldstaneslap, and the kirk and manse taken from Glencorse in the Pentlands, he remembered "how the hilly sweetness ran about his hairt." Great heights of romance are attained in the love idyll between the younger Kirstie Elliott and Archie Weir.

In another department of literature, the

essay, Stevenson was as successful as in fiction. The sunny charm of "Travels with a Donkey" remains with one like the remembered golden hush of a midsummer afternoon. Who that has read "Ordered South," a gem which outdazzles the other brilliant essays in "Virginibus Puerisque," can ever forget that true picture of an invalid on his way towards a land where the welcoming beams of the beneficent sun will inspirit him with renewed health? The incomparable study of Villon, to whose idle and vagabond character Stevenson was sympathetically drawn, in "Men and Books," and the equally unsurpassable sketch in "Memories and Portraits" of the old Scots gardener, no doubt an echo of the one "old and serious, brown and big" in "A Child's Garden," exhibit how

keenly alive Stevenson's attitude was to the human.

Again, his dabbles in verse are not to be ignored. "A Lowden Sabbath Morn" has an appeal both popular and sound. Its humour is unforced yet infectious, as when we read—

> "For noo's the time when pows are seen
> Nid-noddin' like a mandareen;
> When tenty mithers stap a preen
> In sleepin' weans;
> An' nearly half the parochine
> Forget their pains."

or in "A Mile an' a Bittock" with its refrain of "An' the müne was shinin' clearly!" Stevenson, Henry James, and Barrie are all possessed with the childlike spirit of wonder at the world of men and things. Stevenson's child-spirit found an outlet in the familiar "Child's Garden of Verses," quotations from which become

more and more frequent in the procession of time. Such things as "Bed in Summer," "Foreign Lands," "The Land of Counterpane," the oft-quoted "Happy Thought," "The Lamplighter," "Picture-Books in Winter," "The Land of Story-Books," "The Gardener," are so conspicuously successful as to have originated any number of inferior imitations of their kind.

Scarcely any modern author has equalled Cowper, Keats or Fitzgerald in letter-writing, but the charm of Stevenson's letters, so admirably edited by Sir Sidney Colvin, fall little short of these crowning specimens of the epistolary art. Wild schemes and extravaganzas are brought forward in them with such an air of self-confidence and innocent recklessness that they entirely disarm any effort at re-

monstrance. There are references to all manner of things: to money, Russian girls, his own condition as "a complication of cough and bones," to a pen nib, art, death, the sea, religion, drawing-rooms, biography and fiction. Among his many enthusiasms, his whole-hearted relish of Dumas, and especially of "Monte Cristo," finds exuberant outpouring in these pages. Here also is revealed his reprehensible habit of bad spelling, and that something of the advertiser and the bourgeois that one feels in Stevenson's personality. There are vulgar outbursts such as "aw-haw-haw," supposed to be imitative of aristocratic parlance, but in reality only a showing-up of his weakest side—the Bohemianism that occasionally peeps out to determine that Stevenson's was not a

nature the most refined. Reckless slang abounds in the expressions that so and so is a "cheese" and such and such a thing is a "first chop." The idler, the vagabond, the lover of the open road, Stevenson's prominent characteristics rise uppermost,

Like the actor in Gilbert's "Comedy and Tragedy," Stevenson is "a bundle of contradictions—a mass of incongruities." He is a supreme and self-conscious artist in the matter of style*; in some of his views he is an out-and-out Philistine. He rebels against convention, yet he submits to the rigid self-discipline of his art. In his reverence for the Auld Licht type of

* The right tone rings inevitably in his style; in his paragraphs there is a satisfying unity with a sort of tightening up like that of well-tuned strings or with the finish of a Greek medallion, *e.g.*, the second paragraph in Chap. II. of "The Pavilion on the Links."

Scottish character, in his tolerant regard for the Covenanters he falls in with the conventionally sympathetic attitude of many of his national forebears; in his position towards society his Bohemian ways make him break away from its limitations. He is at once "something of the Shorter-Catechist and a streak of Puck." Certain works reveal him as the mature, I was about to say the blasé, don in the university of life, while in other works his innocency proclaims him a mere "fresher," hardly quit from the school atmosphere of rowdyism. Writing of his sojourn in California, his sister-in-law, in a recent number of *Scribner's Magazine*, tells us of his pronounced sense for musical names like Arizona and Susquehanna, and of his acquiring the Spanish language with as

little use of the grammar as possible. There was one specially commendable trait in Stevenson's character that ought never to be overlooked in estimating him. He was never disgruntled by life. There was scarcely any side of life but what he faced fearlessly, almost boldly. There was no flinching with him; and though he sometimes treated it with undue levity, he saw life clearly and saw it whole, and he thought kindly of it. He set his ship in the teeth of the wind from whatever quarter it might chance to blow, and his optimism was steadily enviable through the storm and stress of an invalid life. Because a small measure of health, and ultimately of life, was granted him by Providence, he had, as compensation, an irrepressible zest for life. Never could it be written of

Stevenson what he once wrote in a flippant mood of another—

> "Here lies a man who never did
> Anything but what he was bid;
> Who lived his life in paltry ease,
> And died of commonplace disease."

He was ever generous in his praise of others, and near the end of his life, with the ardent conviction of his own experience, he might have said, in the words of the late Professor York Powell in a letter to Mr. Edward Clodd, "I have had good friends, I have met men I am proud to think about, and if they have cared for me half as much as I have cared for them, I have not been badly loved."

III.

Dreamer and Critic

" . . . *For I have seen*
In lonely places, and in lonelier hours,
My vision of the rainbow-aureoled face
Of her whom men name Beauty: proud, austere:
Dim vision of the far immortal Face,
Divinely fugitive, that haunts the world,
And lifts man's spiral thought to lovelier dreams."

William Sharp (Fiona Macleod)

THESE lines form the keynote or leading theme to the works of a writer whose remarkable spiritual temperament coloured in no small measure the literature extending between the end of last century and the beginning of the present one. To understand William Sharp and his work it is, perhaps, necessary to relate in a condensed version the main points of his life as they are stated in the admirable memoir by his wife, Elizabeth Sharp. " He was born

on 12th September, 1855, at 4 Garthland Place, Paisley." Even when quite young "he was a Viking in build, a Scandinavian in cast of mind, a Celt in heart and spirit." In 1863 Mrs. Sharp's uncle (William Sharp's father) had a house at Blairmore, on Loch Long, for the summer, and her mother took her children "to the neighbouring village of Strone, so that the cousins might become acquainted." When he was eight years old Sharp was "dispatched to what was then one of the chief boarding schools in Scotland — Blair Lodge, in Polmont Woods, between Falkirk and Linlithgow. . . . When their son was twelve years old, William's parents left Paisley and took a house in Glasgow (India Street), and

he was sent as a day scholar to the Glasgow Academy. In his sixteenth year he was laid low with a severe attack of typhoid fever." It was about this time, during his convalescence, that he roamed over the Highlands and first came into contact with Highland fishermen and shepherds, old men and old mothers, and listened to their tales by fireside or at sea in the night-time — material which he was to employ with consummate skill later on in his Gaelic tales. During 1871-72 and 1872-73 he attended the Glasgow University. . . . "In 1874, with a view to finding out in what direction his son's capabilities lay, Mr. David Sharp put him into the office of Messrs. Maclure & Hanney, lawyers, in Glasgow, where he remained till his

health broke down and he was sent to Australia."

After a year or two in Australia, in the late spring of 1878, Sharp settled in London. Then followed a hard struggle to win a place in the literary world—a time full of privations and trouble. It was during these early days in London that he became familiar with Rossetti, a friendship that ripened into deep affection. This being an age of generalisations, it is not unusual to find the public judging a man by the company he keeps. Sharp has continued to be identified with the Pre-Raphaelite persuasion on the grounds, it may be presumed, that he was a social frequenter of that literary coterie. It cannot be gainsaid that Sharp occasionally, very occasionally, verges on the hothouse

atmosphere that is Rossetti, but he no sooner ventures near it than a fresh breeze from his native mountains and seas springs up and blows blithely across his pages, and his intensely healthy spirit sweeps aside the ultra-neurotic and the artificial. It would have been better had Rossetti possessed the health and buoyant love of Nature that were Sharp's envied possessions. The result of this friendship was that, in 1890, he wrote a "Life of Rossetti" which, later in life, he renounced as an immature attempt at biography.

We hear that he secured the post of London art critic to *The Glasgow Herald* in 1883, and, with the object of developing his study of pictures, departed to Italy, a land for which he was destined to gain a profound and lasting love. In July of

that year he was again in London. In August he joined his mother and sisters at Innellan, on the Clyde, and later visited Sir Noel Paton in Arran, whence he wandered over many of his old loved haunts in Loch Fyne, in Mull, and in Iona. . . . "The two important events of 1884," writes Mrs. Sharp, "were the publication of a second volume of poems, and our marriage. . . . We were married, 31st October, 1884, at Christ Church, Lancaster Gate, and his friend, Eric S. Robertson—editor of the Great Writers Series—acted as best man." At the end of November they "settled in a little house in Talgarth Road, West Kensington." Then came into Sharp's life the far-reaching influence of Walter Pater, for Sharp remained a true æsthete

all through his life, one whose ideal was to resurrect the beauty that shines in the past. He was a disciple of Pater's famous "art for art's sake" theory, though his expression of it had a more robust strain than is to be found in Pater's closeted preciousness of style, exquisite though that be. Sharp's two most attractive pen-pictures in his "Papers Critical and Reminiscent" are of Bourke Marston and Walter Pater. In the summer of 1885 there was the prospect of "an idyllic month on West Loch Tarbert." Meanwhile in London a number of literary celebrities had become the guests and friends of Mr. and Mrs. Sharp, among them being George Meredith, Ernest Rhys, W. B. Yeats, John Davidson, Sir William Watson, Andrew Lang, Richard

Le Gallienne, Sir George Douglas, who "came now and again from Kelso," and Charles Mavor, editor of *The Art Review*, who "ran down occasionally from Glasgow." After a visit to America, Sharp commenced on his able and well-known "Life of Browning," a work that places him on a high elevation both as a biographer and critic. In 1890 he settled with his wife for the summer at Clynder, on the Gareloch, "in order to be near his old friend, Dr. Donald Macleod." The beginning of the next year found him wintering in Rome, and later he paid a memorable visit to Walt Whitman in America, started a new periodical, *The Pagan Review*, upon impossible lines, visited Algiers, "went to Scotland—first for three weeks to St. Andrews; then to

Mrs. Glassford Bell's at Tirinie, near Aberfeldy, in Perthshire; then to Corrie, in Arran, for over a fortnight. Then . . . went to Arrochar, &c. Then at my mother's, in Edinburgh."

Sharp's technical knowledge of poetry is displayed to supreme advantage in the full and scholarly historical account of the sonnet form in the introduction to his selection of "Sonnets of the Nineteenth Century." That sensuous poem in "The Human Inheritance," called "The Isle of Love," is one of Sharp's greatest productions as a minor poet. The concluding eight lines of section xi. and the picture of the setting sun in section xxiii., with its magical last line, are worthy of close attention. It is impossible to convey an adequate conception of the strong lyric

impulse that went to the making of Sharp's "Poems" in the volume selected and arranged by his wife. The impressionistic visions, "Sospiri di Roma," the increasing volume of speed and eeriness in the drama of "The Weird of Michael Scott," are only to be out-topped by a lyrical song, perfect of its kind—

"Love in my heart: oh, heart of me, heart of me!
Love is my tyrant, Love is supreme.
What if he passeth, oh, heart of me, heart of me!
Love is a phantom, and Life is a dream!

"What if he changeth, oh, heart of me, heart of me!
Oh, can the waters be void of the wind?
What if he wendeth afar and apart from me,
What if he leave me to perish behind?

"What if he passeth, oh, heart of me, heart of me!
A flame i' the dusk, a breath of Desire?
Nay, my sweet Love is the heart and the soul of me
And I am the innermost heart of his fire!

"Love in my heart: oh, heart of me, heart of me!
Love is my tyrant, Love is supreme,
What if he passeth, oh, heart of me, heart of me!
Love is a phantom, and Life is a dream!"

From time to time Sharp contributed

to periodicals original papers on literary topography, such as The Country of Stevenson, The Country of George Meredith, Aylwin-Land, Thackeray-Land, and these have been collected together in book-form under the title "Literary Geography," and they afford most excellent and refreshing literary rambles.

No stranger mystery has ever haunted and baffled the modern world of letters than when in 1893, with the publication of the romance of "Pharais," there evolved from the personality of William Sharp the additional personality of Fiona Macleod. It was the result of a spiritual experience and development. It was the outlet of the strongly feminine side of Sharp's nature, as much as it became eventually a certain fondness for mystifying the public. The

best of his creative, as apart from his critical, works from now onward were to emanate under the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod. This name, we are told, "was born naturally," for Sharp was associated with the name Macleod. "Fiona is an old Celtic name (meaning 'a fair maid') still occasionally to be found."

In 1895 appeared "The Sin-Eater and Other Tales," dedicated to George Meredith (Prince of Celtdom). The prologue is in the form of a letter to Meredith written from Fiona Macleod's dearly loved island of Iona. The author mentions, when remarking on the spiritual aspect of the Gael, the three powers—"The Living God, the dying World, and the mysterious Race of Man. . . . And, somewhere, in the darkness—'an Dàn,' Destiny." He,

or rather she, addresses Meredith directly, writing of him thus—"In you the Celtic genius burns a pure flame. True, the Cymric blood that is in you moves to a more lightsome measure than that of the Scottish Gael, and the accidents of temperament and life have combined to make you a writer for great peoples rather than for a people. But though England appropriate you as her son, and all the Anglo-Celtic peoples are the heritors of your genius, we claim your brain." The tale of "The Sin-Eater" is treated in a masterly fashion. The idea is something to the effect that a stranger, coming to a house where lies the corpse of one who has been a sinner, can draw away the sins from out of the dead lips, and himself be eventually cleansed of the sins by the winds of heaven.

In the same year was published "The Mountain Lovers," followed in 1896 by "The Washer of the Ford and Other Legendary Moralities." In this book is related how the Washer threw all red souls into the ford water, and when they became white she flung them into the air, and they were severed, and then what fell to the ground the Washer trampled upon till under her feet was only white sand. A book of Fiona Macleod poems, "From the Hills of Dream," succeeded this work. Here there is much to charm and delight —in the beautiful rapture of "In the Shadow," in the pretty fancy of "The Rainbow Bird," the enchanting witchery of "The Hills of Ruel," and the spontaneous beauty of "Dream Fantasy." The verse in the section entitled "Foam of the Past"

does not ring so true and convincing. Some of the "Lyric Runes" are telling, particularly "The Rune of Age," "Prayer of Women," and "The Rune of the Passion of Women." Studied elegance is apparent in "The Closing Doors" from the "Love Songs of Ian Mòr"; while one happens upon a haunting rhythm in "Shule, Shule, Shule, agrah!" the naïve charm of both "Hushing Song" and "Lullaby," and the consummate poem, "The Lonely Hunter." Compared with the "Poems" of William Sharp, all these Fiona Macleod poems are the stuff of dream and "'cleod," whereas the former are "sharp" and clear.

Three years later "The Dominion of Dreams" was published. In many respects this is Fiona Macleod's most artistic achievement, for here we have the

melancholy glamour of the Hebrid Isles and the Hebrid Seas accompanied by the blithe rhythm of life, and the Sassenach is warned that "it were madness to suppose that life in the isles consists of nothing but sadness or melancholy. It is not so, or need not be so, for the Gael is a creature of shadow and shine." Here are old men and women, Uisteans and Barrovians, and natives from Benbecula, from the Lews or Iona, whose minds are thickly woven with the visions and superstitions that linger on through generations of the ancient Gaelic race, and here, again, hardy youth shines resplendent with the first flush of an early summer morning in the eyes of his eager, uplifted face. The most highly imaginative and beautiful tales are "The White Heron," "Alasdair the Proud," "The

Wells of Peace," "The Distant Country," "A Memory of Beauty," and the incomparable "Ulad of the Dreams."

At each fresh production from Fiona's pen the mystery of identity grew deeper and deeper. Save for one or two discerning critics who were sworn to secrecy, the mystery puzzled every one interested in the Neo-Celtic literary movement (sometimes termed the Celtic Renaissance) that swept its way into prominence at the time, largely a result of the enthusiasm of the two Williams, Kings, as it were, of the Celtic domain, William I. or William Sharp and William II. or William Butler Yeats. Wales remained a somewhat passive member of the Association of the six Celtic nations (the Irish, Scots, Welsh, Manx, Breton, and Cornish or British),

though it was ably represented, perhaps more on the critical than on the creative side, by Mr. Ernest Rhys. William Sharp's intense interest in Gaelic folklore and in the spiritual history of the Gael stood him in good stead, though on account of his experiments in psychic phenomena his hypersensitive imagination suffered severely from an overwrought condition. Sharp's aim as a Neo-Celt was "to keep alive the Celtic spirit so that it might become the expression of the racial yearning after spiritual beauty, whether read in the Gaelic or the English language." Mrs. Sharp tells how his frequent indulgence in pure fun prevented his Celtic seriousness and dreaminess from approaching a morbid state.

In 1901 he went to Provence, and on

his return visited Henry James, and had tea at his "quaint and picturesque old house" at Rye, thence to Bordighera, to Rome, and then to Sicily, where he wrote a little song at the request of Miss Maud Valerie White, the song composer, who set it to music based on Sicilian melodies. The poem contains such delicate nuances of imagery that quotation is inevitable—

BUON' RIPOSO.

"When, like a sleeping child
Or a bird in the nest,
The day is gathered
To the earth's breast . . .
Hush! . . . 'tis the dream-wind
Breathing peace,
Breathing rest
Out of the gardens of Sleep in the West.

"O come to me . . . wandering
Wind of the West!
Gray Doves of slumber
Come hither to nest. . . .
Ah, sweet now the fragrance
Below the dim trees
Of the White Rose of Rest
That blooms in the gardens of Sleep in the West."

The summer of 1902 was spent on the isle of Lismore, at the mouth of Loch Linnhe. Sharp's delicate health grew worse, and it was deemed necessary by a few friends that he should be put on the Civil Pension List. "Realising, however, that the writings of William Sharp, considered alone, would not constitute a sufficient claim," it was suggested to Sharp that the Prime Minister should be made aware of the authorship of the Fiona Macleod writings. Sharp consented, "provided that Mr. Balfour were told 'confidentially and verbally.'" It was necessary, nevertheless, that "a statement of entire claims . . . be laid upon the table of the House of Commons for the inspection of members." Sharp objected to this in these words, "To betray publicly

the private life and constrained ideal of that inward self, for a reward's sake, would be a poor collapse. . . . That is why . . . I could not adopt the suggestion, despite promise of the desired pension, even were that tenfold, or any sum. . . . I believe that a spirit has breathed to me, or entered me, or that my soul remembers or has awaked . . . and, that being so, that my concern is not to think of myself or my 'name' or 'reward,' but to do (with what renunciation, financial and other, may be necessary) my truest and best." He wintered in Athens in 1903. There is an interesting reference in a letter at this time. "To-morrow I'll take Gilbert Murray's fine new version of Hippolytus or Bacchæ as my pocket companion to the Theatre of

Dionysus." In 1905 he arrived at what was to be his last resting place on this earth—Sicily. Towards the middle of December of that year he was "fey," fated soon to die. The concluding pages of Mrs. Sharp's memoir describe his quiet, sublime passing away o'er the sunlit waters, perchance to that great Western Island of Lovely Dream, Hy Bràsil. The explanation of the Fiona Macleod mystery is at last cleared up in a letter Sharp himself left behind for one or two friends. He writes, "This will reach you after my death. You will think I have wholly deceived you about Fiona Macleod. But, in an intimate sense, this is not so, though (and inevitably) in certain details I have misled you. Only, it is a mystery. I cannot explain. . . . It is only right,

however, to add that I, and I only, was the author—in the literal and literary sense—of all written under the name of 'Fiona Macleod.'"

One of the last works he, as Fiona Macleod, was engaged upon was "Where the Forest Murmurs," a series of Nature essays. A wide area is covered in these wonderful essays, and he wanders with the born familiarity of the Nature-lover in foreign climes, and through his native land from the Rhinns of Islay to the Ord of Sutherland, from the Torridons of Ross to the Butt of the Lews. He knows the bird-life and the tree-life, the winds and the seas, of his Western Isles, and has a quickened sense of Nature in all her moods, in all her seasons, in every one of her manifold aspects. In one essay,

"The Milky Way," there is too much cataloguing of names. When describing that galaxy of stars, he introduces at the very least six different names that are scattered over until they meet the eye as though inserted thus: item, the Great Bear; item, "Saturn among his mysterious rings"; item, The Silver Road; item, "Watling Street, or The Way of Saint James," followed by a host of other designations. On the other hand, there are educative remarks on the sinister legends associated with the plover, and of more literary value that anything else in the book are the passages of gorgeous colouring, as in "The Mountain Charm," "The Tides," and "The Awakener of the Woods," the last-named showing how great was Sharp's love for forests,

especially when they were richly mantled with snow. Such things as "The oaks dreamed of green water," and "The grey wastes of tempestuous seas know a wave here and there that lifts a huge rampart of jade crowned with snow, or the long resiliency of gigantic billows which reveal smooth falling precipices of azure," flood back upon one's memory with a bright burning sense of beauty. The description of a tempest in "Tragic Landscapes," another part of the same volume, is sternly dramatic. The unconventional rhythmic beauty and motion of the short prose rhythms under the heading, "The Silence of Amor," comprising the first section of the book, could be effectively realized if read out in a voice of dream cadence, a voice that seems to be par-

ticularly the gift of the Irish Celt. One of Fiona Macleod's weaknesses is a too-ready repetition, throughout the works, of certain poetic phrases, epigrams, and imageries till they become rather tiresomely over-thrashed.

Sharp deplored the fact that he was not a musician, and he was proud to count among his friends two American musicians, the composer, Edward M'Dowell, and the musical critic, Lawrence Gilman, both of whom have paid due tribute and indebtedness to Fiona Macleod's art. He had a lively appreciation of contemporary foreign writers, and he himself was influenced to a large extent by Maeterlinck, as his book, "Vistas," makes evident. His characteristics were unconventional. His life was spent very largely in building

castles in the air, for which even the airiest foundations were never laid, and his innumerable projected ideas and schemes came to nothing in the end. That, perhaps, is the fate of most ardent idealists. He was a mystic, a Pantheist, and akin to the French Parnassian school of poets. His knowledge of Gaelic legend and folklore was unbounded. For Italy he had a consuming passion, and the Greek poets, philosophers, and dramatists moved him to complete worship. A pure literary artist out and out, no considerations of sentimentality, of religion, of ethical message were allowed to interfere with his trust and belief in the ideal and the beautiful. For the last twelve years of his life the effort of sustaining his dual personality and authorship—dreamer of dreams and

poet of moods as Fiona Macleod; acute and assured critic of literature and æsthetics as William Sharp—practically cost him his life, as the strain proved too great, and gradually exhausted both his highly imaginative mind and his none too sound health. That is not to be forgotten when, on reading his sunset tales and impressionistic poems, a piquant wistfulness steals out from them and touches the tenderest chords of our being and induces a certain sad sinking of the heart. Inscribed on his gravestone, gently caressed by the soft airs of Sicily, are these words, taken from his tale of "The Distant Country" in "The Dominion of Dreams" —"Love is more great than we conceive, and Death is the keeper of unknown redemptions."

IV.

A Northern Puck

Sir James Barrie, Bart.

THEY say he came from Kirriemuir, N.B., and he himself even hints at it, but we know differently—don't we? Fifty-seven years ago, forsooth, why 'tis only twelve years since he fell to earth with his brother snowflakes. What a pure and delicately scooped-out snowflake he is too! That's why folks think he looks so like an invalid, with his deep-set dreamy eyes, sunken cheeks, and sensitive mouth. After all, there *is* a resemblance between an invalid and a snowflake; they both are, as a rule, white, and look as if they would thaw and vanish at a moment's notice. But then, again, you need to be "romantical" to appreciate a snowflake, and sometimes you're not when you come across an

invalid, though you ought to be. The odd thing about our snowflake—let us call him our good fairy—is that he falls from the sky almost every Christmas with two dear little boy and girl snowflakes clinging to him—one is called Peter and the other Wendy.

You think they must be cold because they are made of snow? Not at all. Our good fairy keeps himself warm by smoking away at the lady of his delight, who calls herself Nicotine, and his companions just love to see the dreamy wreaths of smoke twining and intertwining round about them and rising over them, for they know that the fairy is thinking hard, and that when he strikes his matches he not only lights his pipe to please and heat up himself, but at the same time he sets fire

to the embers of life that are in *them.* He lights them up every Christmas, not only for the sake of keeping poor, dear Peter and Wendy alive, but for our benefit —that we may love these delightful children more and more as the years go by. But then I don't think we are ever likely to forget them—do you?

Yes, of course, I know you think he smokes to keep his spirits warm and bright, and probably you're right—every one wishes to keep as cheery as possible at Christmas time—but if you only knew how warm his heart is! Why, it seems he cannot have too many children in his company, for, though Peter and Wendy always bring their brothers and sisters with them, our fairy begins to languish for more. So he has scratched several

hundred matches and puffed many a puff from his pipe when lo! who should rise up from it, as though an Eastern trick had been performed out of a magic bottle, but Cinderella—that sweet little girl we had all lost for a while. Come now, "a kiss for Cinderella"—one, two, three—oh, but do be careful not to smother her; you'll crush her pretty dress if you don't stop—there, there, that's enough now. We were sure she must have been somewhere in these horrid days of war. Why had we never thought of asking our good fairy about her long before he brought her to life again with the help of his Ariel spirit, Lady Nicotine? We are too much taken up with our own petty affairs, I suppose.

You say you would like to touch our

fairy to be able to tell your friends what he is like? Alas! quite a number of us have tried to catch hold of him, but he invariably slips away—and he is so light-footed, you know. That is more than half of his charm. He can skip into your heart and keep there for quite a while, then when you wish to take hold of him between your finger and thumb to examine him carefully and minutely—off he scamps on a new escapade. It sounds an impossible sort of fairy tale in these days, doesn't it? It's just what happens all the same.

Our fairy can be very sad, forlorn, like a weeping willow, and you feel so terribly sorry not only for him but for everybody and everything that you sob, and your heart begins to melt, and you imagine you will positively be drowned in the pool

of tears that have been wrung from it. Then all at once our good fairy finds that his tender strains are touching us overmuch, so he changes his tune, and starts his merry flute again, playing pranks with the deadly serious view of life. His boyish humour delights in keeping secrets up his sleeve, so that he loves to tantalize everybody by not telling them the names of his new plays and his new characters and his new plots, or anything at all about them—till the first night of the performance, when all the surprises suddenly spring out, one after another. Then he revels to his heart's content in playing that children's game, the game of "Let's pretend"; it is forever cropping up, and, after all, if we would only be honest, every one of us likes to indulge in "make-believe" at

some time or another--you agree?—that's right. His laughter and tears rub shoulders together continually. His comedy breaks out in incongruous, whimsical, irresponsible fashion at the most unexpected places and times. That is his abiding charm—the Comedy of the Unexpected. It may find expression in a pirate's "Ye ho, ye ho, the frisky plank, you walk along it so!" or in the "romantical" notions of a metropolitan policeman. But there!—you can't get hold of him, as I said before.

It was not for nothing that the master of literature, for so many years a resident at Box Hill, in Surrey, whom our fairy has always honoured with the worthiest praise, thought that our fairy was *the* "coming" spirit of modern letters, for he

has been a writer of stories as well as a maker of plays; and he has been not only a genial critic, but a friend treasured by those who have known him intimately. He is not obtrusive or ostentatious, which is really wonderful considering that he bows time and again before an audience perhaps the largest any modern writer has at his command. It sets us wondering how this shy and modest fairy must feel when, with a wave of his magic wand, he can draw laughter or tears from his myriads of hearers and readers all over the world.

Like his brother snowflake, Peter, he will never grow up. He came to earth with the elixir of Eternal Youth in his veins. You are just afraid he will die some day like ordinary mortals? It seems

unthinkable. When the time comes I am sure he will only fade away, or, rather, being a beautiful snowflake, he will simply thaw, vanish like a sudden disappearance in a fairy romance, leaving behind him that wonderfully unique spirit that he has conjured up so often out of his pipe-bowl. In a way, you see, he can never leave us. It makes us happy to think our good fairy, who, I expect you have guessed by this time, is Sir James Barrie—to think he will ever be with us, filling up our eager, stretched-out hands with the priceless gifts from his rich and well-stored argosy.

V.

A Medievalist

Professor W. P. Ker

THERE are only too many persons in Scotland and elsewhere, I believe, to whom the name of Professor William Paton Ker must mean little or nothing. They do not realize how indefatigably he has stormed the stout ramparts of medieval literature, conquered that region, and made it peculiarly his own. Yet he has been in our midst from time to time in the capacity of lecturer, which is a becoming mode of remembrance for a distinguished Scottish scholar. Though references to him are many, there has been practically nothing written directly about Mr. Ker, as far as I am aware, so that the opportunity of delivering a first impression of him and the nature of

his work comes as an unique occasion. Mr. Ker was born in 1855, son of William Ker, merchant, Glasgow. He was educated at the Glasgow Academy, where he became dux in 1870, afterwards gaining the Snell Exhibition at Glasgow University, from whence he proceeded to Balliol College, Oxford. We infer that his career at Oxford must have been a particularly brilliant one, as he finally achieved that high academic distinction, Fellow of All Souls. Unlike Gladstone, who, after getting an All Souls' fellowship, wished to be a clergyman, this scholar evidently wanted to be a professor. The remainder of his career is identified with two professorships, namely, that of English Literature and History in the University College of South Wales, Cardiff, from

1883 to 1889, and subsequently as Quain Professor of English Literature in University College, London, the position he now holds. As can be gathered from the foregoing account, Mr. Ker has basked in the sunshine of success after success, for his brilliant career is a striking example of how a scholar may climb to the highest pinnacle of scholarship, guided from start to finish by the proverbial lucky star.

As regards quantity his output of work is slender; the actual bulk of it is so small that the principal volumes could be enumerated with ease on the fingers of one hand — "Epic and Romance," "The Dark Ages," "Essays on Medieval Literature," "English Literature: Medieval." There is more than compensation for this scantness in the rich quality of

the work. In "Epic and Romance" (1896) we first meet with the boundless range of erudition in his sweep over European literatures — French, German, Icelandic, Welsh, Norse, Danish, Swedish, Faroese. He has a wide sympathy with and understanding of them. His discriminating vision is delicately adjusted. Here he dwells, as in some of his other works, on the poem of the battle of *Maldon*, on *Finnesburh*, and on *Gawain and the Green Knight*. A consistent regard for abstract literary principles proves a solid counterpart to the prominent historical aspect of which he happily never loses sight. The Icelandic Sagas and Histories, the *Nibelungenlied* and Teutonic Epic, the old French Epic, Romantic Mythology are all dealt with

in an amazing and confident manner. He is slow to condemn, and if a work presents little intrinsic merit, it may yet call for his attention from the historical point of view. If ever he does condemn, you may be sure there is good reason for the condemnation.

The remarkably wide survey, geographical as well as literary and historical, of the introduction to "The Dark Ages" (1904) is exactly what one would expect from Mr. Ker. He strides from Greek and Latin to Celtic and Arabian literatures, taking into account on his way the Teutonic languages, Byzantine prose, and arrives at the fascinating romance elements in the old literatures of Ireland and Wales. "Irish verse is founded upon Latin almost entirely. . . . The technical part of Irish verse is not purely

Celtic. . . . Irish prose is openly romantic . . . that is to say, quaint, pathetic, melancholy, grotesque—both in matter and style. . . . Old Irish poetry is found difficult by the best scholars." "Three hundred and thirty-eight varieties of metre in one book" are cited in reference to the old treatises on the art of poetry. Then comes the *Mabinogion*, containing old Welsh stories, the style of which is "native and idiomatic." "Long, interesting stories in prose, difficult artifical work in verse—these are the kinds of literature favoured in Wales and Ireland." "The curious work of modern Welsh poets, which in taste, interest, and ambition is more distant from the English 'reading public' than the poetry of Persia or Japan," is

also discussed. Mr. Ker's knowledge of philology, history, the social conditions and environment of the middle ages shines in a more popular form in "English Literature: Medieval."* In this book his learning can appeal to the understanding of the average person. Covering the Anglo-Saxon and Middle English periods, he touches on all the romances, songs and ballads, comic and allegorical poetry, sermons and histories in verse and prose, of importance. On Chaucer his enthusiasm waxes strong. Lay and fabliau receive the comments due to them. That interesting old word "vair" is

* "English Literature: Medieval." Home University Library. Leather, 2s. 6d. net; cloth, 1s. 3d. net. (Williams & Norgate.) The modest price of this little book should bring it well within reach of any person who has a strong desire to become acquainted with the literary charms of a remote age.

introduced. Here, as in his other two works, he shows a close knowledge of prosody. The attention of Scottish readers should be drawn to the remark that the runic letters carved on the Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire represent "one of the oldest poetical manuscripts in English, not to speak of its importance in other ways." At each fresh assault of the writer's keen intellect our thirst for continued reading increases as we draw nearer and nearer to the conclusion of this valuable book.

Were the question brought forward as to what hidden quality in Mr. Ker's work brings out its savour, it would not be difficult to reply that his learning is kept fresh by a pawky humour. It crops up in "Epic and Romance"—"It would not

have mattered to Odysseus if he had been seen travelling in a cart, like Lancelot; though for Lancelot it was a great misfortune and anxiety." "It is a battle in which the separate deeds of the fighters are described, with not quite so much anatomy as in Homer." And in "The Dark Ages," where we read that "What in the English giant is 'Fee faw fum,' and so on, is in Connaught 'I feel the smell of a melodious lying Irishman under my sod of country'—a more interesting formula." "English Literature: Medieval" is full of humorous allusions. There is the excellent story of "a wake in a churchyard, somewhere in the diocese of Worcester, which was kept up all night long, the dancers repeating one refrain over and over; so that the priest who had this refrain in his

ears all night could not get rid of it in the morning, but repeated it at the Mass —saying (instead of *Dominus vobiscum*) 'Sweet Heart, have pity!'" Discoursing on the fact that *Beowulf* had been copied out as a book for a gentleman's library, Mr. Ker is of opinion that "many trashy things have been equally honoured in gentlemen's libraries," and that, "when the carping critic has done his worst," *Beowulf* remains worthy of consideration for certain qualities. Other examples of humour are found in the method employed by the translator of the *Ayenbite of Inwit* (p. 203); in the troubles of the nun, in the *Ancren Riwle* (p. 210), who keeps a cow that, after going astray, is pounded, and the nun has to pay up damages—"wherefore it is best for nuns to keep a cat

only"; in the crude astronomy of the *South English Legendary* (p. 216); and in the comparison between Chaucer's patience and that of his character, Griselda (p. 249).

Though Mr. Ker has specialized in medieval literature, he has not neglected other periods. His uncommonly "eident" powers have refused to be confined to a limited area. Thus he has published a lecture on Tennyson, the Leslie Stephen Lecture delivered in the Senate House, Cambridge, on 11th November, 1909, wherein he whets our appetite for medieval romance; a lecture on Browning, the Queen's Lecture given at Queen's College, London, on 2nd March, 1910, and forming the third essay in "Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association," vol. i.; and a lecture on the Eighteenth

Century, delivered by him to the English Association in the capacity of President. Under the auspices of the same Association he gave a lecture in the Greek classroom at Glasgow University on "Gawin Douglas and William Dunbar." I can remember how, in his few opening remarks, he alluded with touching grace to the memory of Professor Lushington, in whose class and in that self-same room he had been a student. It was an eloquent tribute. The lecture was interesting as much for the light thrown on Mr. Ker's personality as for its intrinsic merits. His fresh-coloured countenance proclaimed the healthy scholar rather than the ascetic dryasdust we are too apt to associate with most scholars. That was the appeal made by Mr. Ker's personality. His quaint

humour, his leisurely manner of address, the searching look behind the eye-glasses, these hinted that there might be lurking in the background a delightful touch of eccentricity that would make the scholar all the more a lovable and human man. His favourite pursuits, I am given to understand, are healthy ones—walking and mountaineering. He has been generous in giving help to his colleagues, acting, for example, as proof-reader for Saintsbury's standard "Short History of English Literature," and as sponsor to Miss Kate M. Warren's "Treasury of English Literature." In reading through his works I had the fortune to come upon a passage of personal interest that may supplement in some sort of way the picture of the man that has been here suggested. It occurs

in his Browning lecture. "I never met Mr. Browning to speak to, yet I cannot help thinking of him as I saw him when he was still on this side of the picture, when he might be passed, any day, in London, walking in the crowd, perhaps quicker and more observant than most, yet one of the crowd of mortal men. . . . It is easier and less invidious to talk about a row of volumes than a living man. I think of Mr. Browning as one who has stopped to speak to many of my friends, and I am more doubtful than ever about the beginning of this essay. . . . On the other hand, it is very pleasant to think of Mr. Browning 'as he strikes a contemporary.' I remember a gathering at Balliol, now about thirty years since, and the guests of the college as they met there,

and Browning talking to Matthew Arnold at the foot of the steps of the hall; and, before that, an autumn evening in the Island of Arran, the year that 'Pacchiarotto' was published, when Browning met us on the Lamlash Road going home, and I provoked some scepticism in my companions by saying that he was the greatest man in the world."

Mr. Ker's omniscience has been repeatedly observed by many. Evidence of it is scattered profusely throughout his works. Such passages as the following show a full-stored mind:—"When Wordsworth imitates the stanza of Burns he is really imitating William of Poitou, who used it seven hundred years earlier." "*Aucassin and Nicolette*, *Flores and Blanchefloure* may well be Moorish stories.

But their descent is not recorded, except in their character, their manner, some facts of custom that they imply (the *serraglio* in *Flores*), and the etymology of a name (*Aucassin*)." "As critics of life, the old Arabian poets may compare with the most heroic authors in the North, or even with Odin himself." Mr. Ker concurs with Swinburne's repellance against the charge of obscurity so often levelled against Browning. Mr. Ker says, "Obscurity is not the right word," and he quotes Swinburne's observations that "Browning is something too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow, with any certainty, the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity." Mr. Ker is ever the champion of medieval literary works

that have withstood grandly the ravages of time. By way of compliment to his distinguished services in a high form of literature, we offer the following original lines :—

Lo ! with what artist's skill and scholar's care
This master limns a bygone age,
And moves with ease among his throng of guests :
Brynhild, Sir Thopas, Tristrem or Nicolete,
And many another one of lesser name.
Here's heraldry that speaks from times remote,
Rich pictures here like treasur'd galleons which,
With flaunting sail and haughty prow,
Make for the great waste stretches of the sea ;
Or, with due majesty in order trim,
Amid the sway of regal tides,
Float down dim waterways towards some enchanted land.
Here, too, lurk scenes full-flower'd with sweet o' life ;
Bright dyes that paint the tapestry of dreams,
Making them so fair and "bright in bower" ;
The lone grey nights of past romantic love,
With castles, towers, and forests magical ;
Great tomes that tell of legends passing strange,
Of Pride, with mirrour held in gem-weigh'd hands,
Or mighty Valour with his dauntless breast,
Perchance of damsels sore distress'd ;
And tales, too melting for this harsher age,
Snatch'd from the fiery brand of old romance
And made to live as they had ne'er been dead ;
Pages, so filled with lore that's half-forgot,
Transform'd to richest gold within this charmer's hands.

VI.

A Bookman

Sir W. Robertson Nicoll

AS was stated recently, Sir William Robertson Nicoll has been editor of *The British Weekly* for exactly thirty-one years. Perhaps one who has been for some considerable time a constant reader of his literary work in that journal, in *The Bookman*, and in his books, may be allowed to set down some impressions and opinions concerning Sir W. Robertson Nicoll as a bookman and man of letters. I shall try to be as impersonal as may be possible with a subject demanding not a few personal touches. If any one considers my attitude is strongly biassed, the cause should be attributed entirely to appreciation of Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's literary abilities.

Sir W. Robertson Nicoll is captivating as compiler and author. My purpose being to keep in view the bookman, I have selected only the books which in some way or another deal with matters or persons of a purely literary nature. He has edited two series of books, "Contemporary Writers" and "Literary Lives," and, with T. J. Wise, "Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century." He is also the editor of "The Expositor's Bible," "The Expositor's Greek Testament," "The Expositor's Dictionary of Texts," "The Foreign Biblical Library," a complete edition of Charlotte Brontë's works, and part-editor with Thomas Seccombe of "The Bookman Illustrated History of English Literature." "Songs of Rest" (1879) is a selection of poems

which includes work by Dora Greenwell, telling verses by William Barnes (the Dorset poet), a tender little poem by W. R. Nicoll, two choice sonnets by E. B. Browning, some sad and sincere verses by C. G. Rossetti, and healthy optimistic numbers from Björn. Björnsen. In "James Macdonell, Journalist"—of *The Times*—(1889), we hear of Macdonell's early connection with Aberdeen—a phase of his career markedly brought out. One of the best things in the book is a playful glimpse we get from Mrs. Macdonell of Mr. Chenery, of *The Times*, talking with Mr. Froude, the historian, about "the virtues and vices of London and Paris tailors." That Macdonell was not at all attracted by the late Rev. Stopford Brooke's "Broad-Churchism" is informa-

tion that reveals a noticeable aspect of his character.

At times "Letters on Life" is a weak book. It is nearer to sermon-writing than to actual letter-writing in literary form. Still, it possesses the attraction of a clean, straightforward style. One or two of the chapters are worthy of special remark. There is wise counsel in "The Art of Life" and searching truths in "The Art of Conversation," but I am not entirely convinced by the arguments in "That Literature is Autobiography." Those who strive too keenly after success should read "The Sin of Overwork," while those who are discontented might do well to learn how to make the best of what we have and are in "The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae." In "Brilliance" we

wonder why the author should suggest that the "French are the most eloquent and *the least poetical* of nations." Is it not a half-truth only? "The Zest of Life" turns out to be an account of the despondency that fell upon Hawthorne's later life, and this fact is applied in a general way to a want of zest in life. Sir W. Robertson Nicoll speaks of the horror of ennui, and advocates work as a blessing in life in "On Growing Old."

"The Day Book of Claudius Clear" (1905) is a thoughtful book. Personally I prefer it to "Letters on Life" for its excellent literary sidelights. It is Claudius Clear in his reminiscent mood—full of charm and a quiet humour. Here and there the literary atmosphere reminds us of Mrs. Battle's delicious discourse on

Whist. The second part of the book proves to be the best for the *littérateur*. The personal sketches, in mere outline, of the three women novelists, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Jane Austen in "The Dual Life" form an admirable summary of how much or how little their lives were influenced by reality and imagination. Then "In the World of Jane Austen" we are delightfully transformed into a quaint, old-fashioned afternoon-teacup society. "Eheu Evelina" stirs up memories of past romance, and "The Tragedy of First Numbers" shows insight into journalistic experiences and experimental ventures when starting new periodicals. That strange personality and High Churchman, R. H. Hutton, of *The Spectator*, is revealed with delicate skill

in a tone of winning intimacy. It is distressing and almost incredible, however, at the present time, when appreciation of Meredith was never so much on the steady increase, to find that a discerning critic like Hutton "depreciated Meredith's novels." Incidentally, among various anecdotes, we read of Dr. Alex. Bain's peculiar methods of teaching English literature, and we read that, referring to a favourable criticism of his poems, James Payn the novelist remarked the criticism was "like ten thousand tonics in a single dose"! The book closes with a study of Dr. George Macdonald that is alive and wholesome.

Whether one agrees or not with the arguments set forth in "The Problem of Edwin Drood" (1912), one must, at any

rate, admit that the investigation of the mystery is a very thorough one.

I feel positive that "A Bookman's Letters" (1913) must be considered by every *littérateur* as one of the happiest collection of literary papers we have had for some time. What suggestive ideas and variety of outlook open out to us in these articles! From "Memories of Meredith" we may take the following as first-hand observation of the great novelist:—"Visitors were impressed by his (Meredith's) lofty and gracious bearing." "The simple dignity of his life amidst some of the most beautiful scenery in England, the magnificent way in which he carried off his infirmity, his bright, glancing talk, and the unwearied keenness of his mind left an ineffaceable

impression on all who came near him." "The habit and the uniform intention of his life were of extreme courtesy." "The Six Best Biographies" discusses the comparative merits of Boswell's "Johnson," Lockhart's "Scott," Mrs. Gaskell's "Charlotte Brontë," Trevelyan's "Macaulay," Froude's "Carlyle," and Morley's "Gladstone." An essay is devoted to that neglected writer, G. A. Simcox, who was unfortunately troubled with a stammer. "Learning to Read" offers valuable advice to the uninitiated on what books to procure for an introduction to the more outstanding of the great writers. "Rereading" shows the author's thorough knowledge of literature. He writes, "I know 'Pickwick' so well that at the end of a page, without turning, I could almost

continue the narrative." There are chatty impressions of Professor Masson, the kindly Dr. Garnett, and the great journalist, Frederick Greenwood, "founder and editor successively of the *Pall Mall* and *St. James's Gazettes*," not to mention two essays on the evergreen questions, "Was Thackeray a Cynic?" and "Why Did Shakespeare Retire to Stratford-on-Avon?" The name of the last paper, "The Acacias of Lausanne," is suggested by the feelings of something even greater than satisfaction experienced by Gibbon on the completion of "The Decline and Fall" under the acacias of Lausanne. To these books may be added Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's introductions to "Gilfillan's Literary Portraits," Mrs. Oliphant's "Salem Chapel," George Eliot's "Mill

on the Floss," O. W. Holmes's "Poet" and "Professor" essays, Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" and "Shirley."

Sir W. Robertson Nicoll has proved himself over and over again to be a sound judge of biography and oratory. His praise of Boswell's "Johnson" and Morley's "Gladstone" is too well known to be detailed here. He became interested with Watts-Dunton in the idea of the renascence of wonder. He claims authority with Mr. Shorter and Mr. Birrell in elucidating the secret of Charlotte Brontë. He is the equal of Mr. Herbert Jenkins in his enthusiasm for matters Borrovian. He has done more than his share in furthering the interests of Francis Thompson's poetry. In Meredithian criticism he has not lagged behind. "George

Meredith," he writes, "is equally brilliant in his books and in his conversation." He greatly encouraged Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler in her early stages of novel writing. It is certain that we might never have known of Mark Rutherford had it not been for Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's early recognition of that author; most of our knowledge about the works is entirely due to him—a literary treasure-trove as all-important as his earlier discovery of Sir James Barrie.

What is our final impression of the work of this bookman? Does it not reveal an elusive and winsome charm, like Lamb's, that strangely combines an eighteenth-century nimbleness with a Victorian austerity and an additional vein of "kailyard" sentimentalism? We feel,

I think, that a baffling personality exists behind those columns and pages that compels our admiration. He is widely travelled in bookland; he is an erudite and extensive reader. Bookish subjects of almost every description attract him. In an article on "Holiday Reading" he once commented upon his favourite works —both great books and light books— and the reasons for their holding a true and catholic bookman's attention during holiday-time. Wonderful is his faculty for "docketing" lesser-known works. He is one of our prime literary investigators. He has shed a genial light in several of the mustiest corners of our literature with a vigour and determination greatly to be envied. His verdicts are usually tinged with the sane compromise of the Victorian

days. His mental attitude wavers between literature and life. Prodigious is his knowledge of literary "odd fry"—reporters, printers, bookbinders, bookmakers, and the "worthies" of the trade. The professed reader of English literature cannot afford to overlook Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's contributions to modern literary criticism. Such a person would do well to read them if it were for nothing more than for their steadfast reverence for the great writers of our imperishable literary heritage.

NOTE.—*I yield to none in my admiration of Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's journalism. He is undoubtedly one of the few eminent living journalists. At this time of day it may seem unnecessary to mention the wonderful writing powers shown in "The British Weekly." For some years now every Thursday I have looked forward, in anticipation of a literary treat, to "The British Weekly" articles in The Correspondence of Claudius*

Clear. The contributions under that heading and the Rambling Remarks of a Man of Kent are clear and alert writings of the best type—sharply defined and without unnecessary embellishments. The epistles touch on a wide range of subjects, often topical; sometimes they are of the nature of table talk; and frequently they are written in the essay form. There were recent dissertations on such diverse themes as dreams and diaries. I often think the Claudius Clear articles are models of construction—in fact, just what newspaper articles ought to be. Each section grows into a rounded entity, complete in itself—the sure and unmistakable sign of an experienced journalist. Again, in a column of news notes, Sir W. Robertson Nicoll will chronicle daily events with the same care as he would chronicle a literary episode in a well-turned article. That brilliant young critic, the late Dixon Scott, in his "Men of Letters," has paid high tribute to Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's gifted style, and a prominent public man, it is said, once ventured the opinion that "Sir William Robertson Nicoll of 'The British Weekly' was probably the finest leader writer in Europe."

VII.

The Children's Advocate

Kenneth Grahame

THE charm that is Carroll and the charm that is Barrie—yes, but these charms are already taken for granted. But the charm that is Grahame is not, perhaps, so popularly known and acknowledged. For the satisfactory education of the very young child, at least three courses of child books should be introduced into the elementary classes in every school curriculum—nay, it should be made positively compulsory by Act of Parliament. Beginning with Edward Lear's "Book of Nonsense," there should follow a course of "Alice in Wonderland," "Through the Looking-Glass," and "Peter Pan," and then a final course of the classics, Thackeray's "The Rose and the Ring" and Stevenson's

"Child's Garden of Verse." It is inconceivable to think of a youngster passing through childhood entirely unfamiliar with these wonderful reflections of the child mind and the child's way of looking at things, and not the least important channels for conveying these reflections are the works of Mr. Kenneth Grahame.

Mr. Kenneth Grahame was born in Edinburgh in 1859, the son of the late Mr. J. C. Grahame, advocate, and great-grandson of Archibald Grahame of Dalmarnock, Lanarkshire, and Drumquhassil, Stirlingshire, and Glasgow. After being educated at St. Edward's School, Oxford, he was for some fifteen years acting secretary and secretary to the Bank of England, but abandoned London for a country life in 1908, and has lived mostly

in Berkshire. It is interesting to note that he served seven years in the London Scottish.*

Three years after his first published work, "The Headswoman," a short satirical tale, there appeared a veritable harvest of a quiet mind in the essays called "Pagan Papers." He leisurely scatters these fugitive essays on our lap with a freedom, an abandon, a health that might be the envy of the gipsy, the vagabond, or any open-air vagrant as well as of the assiduous bookman who knows his Nature from books. "The Rural Pan (An April Essay)" is superlatively beautiful in its conception and writing. A personal touch of humour increases

* For these biographical facts I am deeply indebted to the courtesy of Mr. John Lane (the original publisher of Mr. Kenneth Grahame's books), from whom I obtained them.

interest in "Marginalia," where the author records how, in a certain book, he once drew on one side of the page a number of negroes, "swart as sucked lead-pencil could limn them," and how easy it was by a touch of the pen to change "battle" into "bottle" in a reference, in his Roman History, to the battle of Magnesia. Suggestions of Elizabethan prose embroider the ideas embodied in "Deus Terminus" and "Of Smoking." The Stevenson outlook is happily captured in "Loafing," and the bloom of "The White Poppy" is as deeply tinged with pure prose poetry as is "The Fairy Wicket." "An Autumn Encounter" with a scarecrow shows grotesque originality. A certain rude revelry in Pan and in things Pagan is contained in the jubilant essay of "Orion"

—it is the irresistible clarion call of the cloven-hoofed, the horned, the goat-like figure of Pan as symbolised in the star, Orion—the Hunter.

It was by his far-famed "The Golden Age," however, that Mr. Kenneth Grahame's powers rose to pre-eminence. It was hailed by Swinburne as "one of the few books which are well-nigh too praiseworthy for praise." He remarked that "the fit reader finds himself a child again while reading it. Immortality should be the reward — but it must have been the birthright—of this happy genius. . . . Praise would be as superfluous as analysis would be impertinent." That criticism places Mr. Grahame very high indeed, but by no means too high. Any one who is capable

of revelling in the music and beauty of the elements will readily understand how Swinburne would appreciate, for instance, "A Holiday," with the magnificent rush and sweep in the opening description of "the masterful wind and awakening Nature." It is in this first scene that Mr. Grahame introduces us to the little girl, Charlotte, one of the four children who form the character-group in both this book and the almost equally superb "Dream Days," the other children being Edward, Harold, and Selina—not to speak of the unobtrusive part of brother played by the author himself in the first person singular. The idiosyncrasies of each child are clearly presented without any undue insistence on the part of the author. Who has not heard of the intolerable

tyranny of the Olympians, the grown-ups? "Children heed no minor distinctions. To them the inhabited world is composed of the two main divisions—children and upgrown people; the latter in no way superior to the former—only hopelessly different." The brother, in the first person singular, remarks to Edward, "I never can make out what people come here to tea for. They can have their own tea at home if they like—they're not poor people—with jam and things, and drink out of their saucer, and suck their fingers, and enjoy themselves; but they come here from a long way off, and sit up straight with their feet off the bars of their chairs, and have one cup, and talk the same sort of stuff every time"; to which Harold adds that society people come out into the garden,

and pat his head—"I wish people wouldn't do that"—and one of them asked him to pick her a flower. "The world, as known to me," says the brother of the first person singular, addressing his readers, "was spread with food each several mid-day, and the particular table one sat at seemed a matter of no importance." But Olympian tyranny o'erleapt itself when Harold "found himself shut up in the schoolroom after hours, merely for insisting that 7 times 7 amounted to 47. The injustice of it seemed so flagrant. Why not 47 as much as 49? One number was no prettier than the other to look at, and it was evidently only a matter of arbitrary taste and preference; and, anyhow, it had always been 47 to him, and would be to the end of time."

In the pages of these two books we live over again our erstwhile manly attitude of revolt and our glad, precipitate escape to day dreams, for, "as a rule, indeed, grown-up people are fairly correct on matters of fact; it is in the higher gift of imagination that they are so sadly to seek." The cycle of the seasons forms an ever-present background to whatever incident takes place, whether it be when the evening church service is shorter than usual because "the vicar, as he ascended the pulpit steps," dropped two pages out of his sermon-case; or whether it be when, in his made-up story to the new curate, on whose "spooning" with Aunt Maria he had been ordered, by Edward, to spy, Harold's fictitious burglars are said to have "vanished silently into the laurels, with horrid implications!"

Then in "Dream Days" Mr. Kenneth Grahame takes us so near to the tender hearts and wondering minds, the adventurous spirits and whimsical humours of children that after we have read the last words of the book we feel we have to rub our fists against our eyelids or pinch ourselves at some part of our person to realize if we are really awake in a material world or if it be true that we are once more the children of fleeting days of glory. Who is not the richer spiritually for having read "Its Walls were as of Jasper," "The Magic Ring," and "The Reluctant Dragon" in "Dream Days"? Mr. Kenneth Grahame draws upon a furtive, insinuating winsomeness, and the tablets of his memory are deeply engraved with words and notes of sweet music that chime again and again

the rose-winged hours of eternal childhood, be it in "Pagan Papers" or in "The Golden Age," in "Dream Days" or in his latest book, "The Wind in the Willows."

For the most part, Mr. Kenneth Grahame's backgrounds are, first, a pastoral landscape that is replete with here a saturnalia of whirling leaves and there an orgy and riot of spring-blossom on the laughing hedgerows, and, secondly, a quiet pleasaunce with visions that lurk among the garden shadows, and dance upon the lush grass and round the mignonette or the meadowsweet — a homely, old-world seclusion at peace with its sometimes noisy inhabitants. The muse that presides is a jealously-guarded Mistress of Ceremonies, and childish homage will brook no intrusion into her

hallowed precincts by hopeless outsiders; but often after a day of sunshine the evening light announces a change, and banks of dark cloud loom in the distance and stealthily steal up from the horizon. Of course, there may always be the chance, in Mr. Kenneth Grahame's books, that the Olympian "gulfs will wash us down," but it is far more frequent that in children's company "we touch the Happy Isles." Even on a day of pitiless rain there are pranks enough and to spare to while away the time in forgetful mood, absorbed in make-believe argosies and pirate escapades, in visions of dream palaces, or in the quaint spectacle of Harold as a muffin-man "ringing an imaginary bell and offering airy muffins of his own make to a bustling, thronging crowd of his own creation."

Mr. Grahame's humour is light and subtle, yet shining clear as a crystal. His prose combines in an exceptional way an unrivalled spontaneity of vision with a mature command of the most gracefully resilient style imaginable. Not only so; there is woven into the prose-texture innumerable tenderly poetic imageries and figures of speech that entrance and enthral to the utmost degree. Had one been unaware that he was one of the elect few who contributed to that famous illustrated quarterly of the eighteen-nineties, *The Yellow Book*, one might have guessed as much, for at that period he must somehow have caught the bright, happy lustre from that *Yellow Book*, the golden hue of sunshine that permeates all his work. In fine, the "bright-enamelled" pageantry of

Nature when related so harmoniously and so intimately, so nearly and so humanly to child-life must ever ring a responsive echo in us—that is to say, if beneath our breasts a child's heart beats out its exultations and its despairs, if in our minds a child's imagination plays out its long games of delight and hides those sensitive, hidden sufferings that only children and the child-like among us experience in their journey, be it ever so rough, through the world towards the ultimate Hills of Joy. It is on the crest of these Hills that Mr. Kenneth Grahame has erected his triumphal arch, and upon its rich stonework are inscribed the indelible letters to be seen by all who come there to understand—The Triumph of the Innocents.

VIII.

A Gentleman of Letters

"Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head?"

—*The Merchant of Venice,*
Act III., Sc. ii.

Sir George Douglas, Bart.

IT was a happy day when Scotland first realized in the nobly-bred gentleman of letters, whose repute has been identified so closely with the Borders and Border lore, Sir George Brisbane Scott Douglas, Bart., that she had found not only a loyal critic of her glorious literary sons, but a discerning interpreter of their treasured works. Born in Gibraltar in 1856, Sir George Douglas was educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge. His first known work is a volume of poems, but for our present

purpose these poems may be considered in the light of the usual poetic preliminaries that herald the advent of the youthful *littérateur*. With the exception of his pageant-play and the mere mention of that "weel-buskit" poem called "A Night-Piece" from "Poems of a Country Gentleman," it is my intention to dwell rather on Sir George Douglas's prose than on his poetical works.

"Scottish Minor Poets" and "Contemporary Scottish Verse" are carefully edited selections of Scottish poetry. Included among the number is John Logan's "Ode to the Cuckoo," which Burke considered the most beautiful lyric in the language. There is also Thomas Davidson's remarkable rural

poem "On the Cheviots," with its striking lines—

> "Fate drives us from the fields of youth,
> And no returning step allows."

Lovers of eerie, mysterious, and ghost stories should be satisfied with the fare provided in "The New Border Tales," for the book-motto of which might be taken the words, "'Twas fated sae to be, and ilk ane maun dree his weird." "The Chief Mourner" is narrated in choice and polished language. "John Buncle" is an Æsop's fable spiced with inferred humour, and it relates how Buncle, a stone-breaker, after cursing his lot and tracing the source of the evil to the temptation in Eden, was himself made a dupe by a stylish gentleman and shown how inherently strong in himself (Buncle), as in most of the human

race, is the regrettable curiosity of a Pandora. Among others are the murder tales of Will Winter, a youth belonging to the Yetholm gipsy family of that name, and of Rob Scott, the simpleton and athlete.

Sir George Douglas has written with a marked precision of touch in "The Blackwood Group," containing admirable dissertations on Christopher North, John Galt, D. M. Moir, Miss Ferrier, Michael Scott, and Thomas Hamilton. One or two pronounced points remain clearly in the memory for some time after a reading of the book, as, for example, that in his strivings towards "the ideal of the sound mind in the sound body," Christopher North "aspired to the mind of a philosopher in the body of an athlete." That North attained to this state of Greek

perfection, even for the period which the facts of his latter years prove to have been only too short an one, is matter for satisfaction; and it is also an exemplary feat that might be followed with advantage by many unhealthy pedants of a later day. This is an alluring paper, with its calm, easy movement, and our eagerly drained cup of delight is once more replenished by the appreciation of that overshadowed master of fiction, Galt, whose "passion for flowers and for music gave evidence of a sensibility" in his childhood, as rare as it was remarkable. Amid a very full account of Galt's life and works there is a consummate passage where he and Scott are acutely distinguished. Then, in the sympathetic study of that strenuous Jane Austen of Scots fiction, Susan Ferrier, the story

of her masterpiece, "The Inheritance," is sketched in clear, comprehensive outline, and summed up in the final verdict that "probably few 'novels of plot' are so rich in character, few 'novels of character' so strong in plot."

There is an intermixture of scholarship and fancy in the biography of the self-complacent James Hogg, "the unrivalled teller of the twilight tale of bogle, wraith, or fairy, and the deviser of pastoral melodies." The author's fancy has full play in the opening pages. In this human study of an intensely individual figure in Scottish poetry, recounting, as it does, his pecuniary difficulties and reverses, his self-assertion, and indiscreet talk, it is maintained that, "if easily elated, easily cast down, Hogg's nature was far too healthy

to brood long over the buffets of fortune." The comments on the unexampled friendship between Scott and Hogg are the most moving part of the biography. The transition in Hogg's life occupies the lengthy fourth paragraph in Chapter III., and in it Sir George Douglas's style rises to undoubted distinction. The panegyric element is held in check and balanced to a nicety, and a fragrant breath of wholesome humanity pervades the entire estimate. Unlike Wordsworth, who is *the* poet of the eye, "Hogg is a poet who addresses himself rather to the ear than to the eye." In Sir George Douglas's analysis of "Kilmeny" he mentions that there is a striking combination of music and wistfulness in its narrative verse. Hogg's distinctive work was dealing with the

supernatural in prose and verse alike. What the author says in reference to "The Pilgrims of the Sun" is true of many supernatural poets—"restraints are what for their own advantage they should seek." "The Brownie of Bodsbeck" and Hogg's other prose tales are touched upon. The biographer investigates with scholarly insight the doubtful authorship, lying between Hogg and Lockhart, of "Confessions of a Fanatic." Following Hogg's Life come moderately interesting treatises on Tannahill and Motherwell, while in the miniature of William Thom, the Aberdeen poet, the final sketch included in the volume, there is an impressive peroration on the evil consequences of excessive drinking on the Scottish muse.

Sterling criticism abounds in the lectures on Scottish poetry,* delivered at Glasgow University. The lecture on James Thomson is a felicitous piece of discriminate judgment. Hardly inferior to it is the criticism of the artificial conceits and poems of the beautiful created by Drùmmond of Hawthornden, whose aristocratic exclusiveness is pictured in the delicate vignette portraying his personality. Though the outlook in these lectures is a scholar's one, the style is, for the most part, colloquial.

Sir George Douglas has always encouraged with vigorous enthusiasm the attempted establishment of a national theatre to produce Scottish drama. It

* "Scottish Poetry: Drummond of Hawthornden to Fergusson." (James MacLehose & Sons, 1911.)

was only to be expected, therefore, that for the Scottish Historical Exhibition in Glasgow in 1911 he should write a little play in five scenes of the texture of that supreme pageantry with which the romantic side of Scottish literature and history is amply furnished. The martial mien and pomp are apportioned with fitting regularity in the romantic atmosphere of "The Pageant of the Bruce." Rather expressive of the longing reflections at present cast back into the peaceful past is the passage—

> "Ah! then this bitter, much-enduring land
> Had rest awhile from war; the husbandman
> Till'd peacefully his field, and saw in dreams
> A wilderness that blossom'd like the rose."

The rhymed verse in general and the Black Douglas's blank verse towards the end of Scene IV. proceed at a sustained

high level. It must be reluctantly admitted that the characters are weak; Bruce, his brother Edward, Neil Campbell, the Black Douglas, Lennox, Randolph, and Cuthbert are all of them mere puppets. In such parts as—

> "Like a blown torch or cloud-encountering star—
> A robe, moth-fretted, a rust-canker'd ring,
> The guise and cognizance that mark the king—"

Sir George Douglas can turn a pretty conceit and shows a playful art. For beauty of sentiment and expression, take the following, spoken by the Queen :—

> "Here have we relish'd oft our frugal fare,
> Forgetting danger and th' uncertain morn;
> While summer lengthen'd out her endless eves
> Thro' northern nights which scarce are night at all.
> Here, on to glimmering midnight linger'd we,
> Hearing my lord the king melodiously
> Read from a little store-house of romance
> The valiant deeds of Champion Ferambras,
> Of Bianconoré and Amandelice
> The chequer'd loves."

Then the climax of the pageant is

in Bruce's words at the close of Scene III.—

"Minstrel, your strain rings true more ways than one.
The season touches on its close indeed!
The wailing winds, the weeping autumn rains,
Fast fading forests and loud-clamouring floods,
The long dark nights and dim diminish'd days:
All these portend a change—a change of rule,
That sets a term to these light-hearted hours:
Summer's benignant sceptre reft away,
That Winter in a jaggèd crown may reign.
Scotland! thou little land yet passing dear!
Thou hast cost me wounds ere now but scarce a tear.
Father and mother—nay, but child and wife
A man shall leave, to lead his toilsome life
Uncheer'd, companionless, proscribed and bann'd—
Scotland, for thee, thou little well-loved land!"

Too many soliloquies from Bruce retard the action, which never increases beyond its languid pace till near the finale—about thirty pages from the end, but Bruce's long speech in the first scene has the true ring of rhetoric in it. It need only be added that "The Pageant of the Bruce" never pretends to be a purely dramatic play,

but rather sets its limits well within the confines of the historico-lyrical pageant.

Whenever it is employed, the first and most striking, as it is perhaps the most overworked, side of Sir George Douglas's prose writing is his too facile fancy, and though that has insuperable drawbacks, it at least shows a fertile mind. But this fancy is at once his *forte* and his bane. It is apt, as any number of quotations might prove, to glut an otherwise polished style. The theme of which he writes may permit of so much fancy, but in such a subject as the Arcadian scenes in the dale of Ettrick, with all their Forest of Arden glamour, exception may be taken to the over-indulgence of fancy. It were better had the author been more sparing in the use of it, for, after all, fancy is but

a flimsy quality; it has not imagination's durable fibre. In a sense, fancy has the illuminating success of *feu d'artifice*, but for that kind of success one cares not a jot or tittle. Far from wishing to deride it, when used in its proper place and proportion, as in "The Pageant of the Bruce," one welcomes its resplendence. More correctly speaking, in prose literature fancy takes the place of a table delicacy, and it is neither wholesome nor desirable for the literary palate to be satiated with a superabundance of table delicacy. Again, it reminds one of a too-potent bouquet exhaling from a beaker of wine; the ruby sparkles mount to the gold brim, over which they spill only to stain the carved sides of the goblet's exquisite form. In fine, fancy is a savoury to be more freely

used in poetry than in prose. But such a defect in his prose may be readily forgiven by the recognition of Sir George Douglas's many supreme qualities, not the least noticeable of which is his masterly control of limpid style and careful construction, stamping them as particularly successful for biographical work.

Some of his most attractive criticism is to be found in fugitive pieces hidden in "the unsunned caverns" of periodicals and lecture pamphlets. About 1901 or 1902 there came into existence a comparatively short-lived journal, *Scottish Art and Letters*, to which Sir George Douglas contributed a series of articles under the heading, Lettered Leisure. These papers have recaptured the scent of field and hedgerow which has been in abeyance in

our literature since the death of Richard Jefferies, while the paper on Harrow School Revisited shows glimpses of personal sidelights reminiscent of "Tom Brown's Schooldays." Literary enthusiasts in Glasgow who had the privilege of hearing him lecture on Scott and Dickens a few years ago, under the auspices of the Glasgow Dickens Society, will remember with pride the ease, grace, and fluency of Sir George Douglas's most scholarly address, delivered with the well-bred courtesy of one of Nature's cultured gentlemen of letters. His opening remarks in his toast to the memory of Scott at the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club in 1898 refer to the fever of admiration for Carlyle rampant in literary circles about forty years ago. He pays no feeble

tribute to Scott's powers of historical research. In the speech to the Musselburgh Burns Club in 1900 his words on the Ayrshire bard are eloquent—"As surely as we owe to Wallace and to Bruce our national independence, to Knox and to the Covenanters our liberty of conscience, so do we owe to Burns the finer essence of our patriotism. . . . By the towering eminence of its intellectual might his life has performed for us this service; it has permanently extended the empire of the human mind, once and for all enlarged our conception of the dignity of our common manhood, of the height to which our nature may attain." Then the speaker relates that at the birth of Burns "there is dramatic propriety in the advent of that wondrous black-browed

babe, ushered in by no meaner pageant than the whirl of elements on a night of Scottish mid-winter."

As a critic Sir George Douglas has a singularly clear line of vision. His criticism is discriminate and guarded; the pros and cons are well weighed. He has a thorough knowledge of the French novelists, to whom he fondly alludes, and whom, along with certain Dutch painters, he introduces as parallels or as contrasts in elucidating the subject under his immediate survey. He is a close reader of Thomas Hardy's works, and has a secret admiration for Hoffmann's tales. In criticizing writers he speaks in no uncertain voice if it be a question of style or construction. When he pays tribute, it is with a royal courtesy; when he

disapproves, it is with unwilling and tender regret. He bears no malice, rather his failings lean to virtue's side; and it may be said that, on every possible occasion, he has been able "to fashion all things fair."

IX.

Our Dramatic Mentor

William Archer

IT was surely the happiest of inspirations that visited the gods when they chose to confer on the greatest mentor among the dramatic critics of our time the appropriate name of Archer. Though the ground covered in a chance perusal of his works be ever so reasonably limited, it is impossible to have done even that much and to remain unastonished at the invariably sure aim with which the arrow is lodged every time in each one of the numerous theatrical and dramatic targets that are this critic's main objectives. Not only so; after the arrow has left the bow with a light, crisp twang, it sings its way through the air melodiously and gracefully to its destined mark. There is no swerve,

no firework display or flourish, no ricocheting, no parabolic curve, but instead a direct dart to the centre of the target, or, in other words, to the heart of the question under discussion. You, the observer, may hesitate, and shrink, and doubt, but only for the space of a moment. You wonder and wonder as you walk towards the target if, indeed, your eyesight is so much the poorer in comparison with the alert sight that has been gifted to this accurate marksman. As you near the target you discern how mistaken has been your view, and when at last you arrive close to the mark you find that the point of the arrow has been firmly planted in the very centre of the black circle.

Mr. William Archer was born at Perth on 23rd September, 1856, son of Thomas

Archer, C.M.G., of Gracemere, Queensland, formerly Agent-General for Queensland in London. He was educated at Edinburgh University, where he took his M.A. degree. In 1875 he became a journalist on the staff of the *Edinburgh Evening News*, and, after travelling during 1876-1877 in Australia, he returned to Edinburgh. He went to London in 1878, and acted as dramatic critic for the London *Figaro* between 1879-1881. Travelling for a year, 1881-1882, in Italy, he became a barrister of the Middle Temple in 1883. It was in 1884, however, that he established his reputation as a renowned dramatic critic when he wrote for the *World*, a connexion with the London Press which continued vigorously till 1905. Since then he has written from time to time for the

Tribune, the *Nation*, the *Star*, and many other journals. His introduction of Ibsen's works to the British play-going and play-reading public has contributed largely to his fame as critic, translator, and promoter of the intellectual drama. Among these translations there may be mentioned Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*, produced at the Gaiety Theatre, London, in 1880; *A Doll's House* (1889); *The Master Builder* (1893); in collaboration with his brother, Major Charles Archer, *Peer Gynt; Little Eyolf* (1895); and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1897). He has also translated, alone or in collaboration, other plays of the Scandinavian and Continental stage, such as Edvard Brandes's *A Visit* and Gerhart Hauptmann's *Hannele.* Perhaps his best

works on dramatic themes are, "English Dramatists of To-day" (1882); "Henry Irving, Actor and Manager" (1883); "About the Theatre" (1886); "Masks or Faces? A Study in the Psychology of Acting" (1888); "William Charles Macready" (1890); "The Theatrical 'World'" (dramatic criticisms reprinted), vols. i.-v. (1893-1897); "Study and Stage, a Yearbook of Criticism" (1899); "Poets of the Younger Generation" (1901); "Real Conversations" (1904); "Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship" (1912). Latterly his interests have centred on subjects of the day and hour, on social and political problems.

As far back as 1885 (some thirty-two years ago!) an anonymous review of his "Child's Garden of Verse" had won the

admiration of R. L. Stevenson, and even at that time in young Mr. Archer Stevenson had discovered a critic of no mean order. The discovery started a friendship between them that lasted for the remaining nine years of the elder writer's life. Mr. Archer was among the distinguished guests that used to visit Stevenson at Bournemouth, and he was the means of introducing Stevenson to Shaw's early and unsuccessful attempt at fiction, "Cashel Byron's Profession," which had been reviewed by Mr. Archer. As expressed in the inimitable *Letters*, Stevenson looked upon Mr. Archer as "a very clever fellow, and I believe a good one," and he admired his "sober, agile pen" and the "august manner" of his writing—comments that are undeniably true.

Mr. Archer's dedicatory epistle to his friend, Mr. Robert W. Lowe, in "The Theatrical 'World,' 1893," gives us some autobiographical confessions—"I was a country-bred child, and none of my family had any connection with the stage, or took any particular interest in it; yet I cannot remember the time when the word 'theatre' had not a strange fascination for me. I did not in the least know what a theatre was, but I knew it was one of the things I most wanted to know. . . . I must have been twelve or thirteen before I saw the inside—or for that matter the outside—of a real theatre. My father had promised to take me for a short yachting cruise in the Solent. We were to lie for some days in Portsmouth harbour. . . . I knew there was a theatre at Portsmouth, and

what I had chiefly set my heart on . . . was to persuade my father to take me to it. He did; we saw Wallace's *Maritana*. . . . But the full glory of the mimic world did not burst upon me until I saw a Drury Lane pantomime—*Beauty and the Beast*. . . . It was not till some years later that you and I first met in that city which, like our dear and illustrious fellow-townsman, the author of *Catriona*, we must ever think of as our home. . . . We must have spent hundreds of hours together on our favourite back seat of the Princess's pit; and they were among the pleasantest hours, and certainly not the least profitable, of my life. . . . In the course of a couple of seasons or so, we saw *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Romeo and*

Juliet, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Cymbeline*, to say nothing of *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *Richelieu*, *Money*—in short, the whole standard repertory of the English stage. A tolerably liberal education, was it not? And we not only saw, we studied most of these plays. We were learned in 'readings' and 'business,' critical of emphases, intransigent on questions of metre. I have sometimes been accused, in these latter days, of slighting and undervaluing Shakespeare. Well, I will not say that I *appreciate* him—who dares make such a boast?—but you and I know how we loved him. I have probably received more pure, unmixed pleasure from *As you Like It* than from any other play that ever was written; but *Romeo and*

Juliet runs it hard in my affections. How often have we seen these plays, I wonder? There was a time when I am sure we could have 'taken up' any cue in them, and given the substance, if not the words, of the following speech. . . . Our experiences, too, were by no means confined to Edinburgh. Together (you remember?) we saw Salvini's *Othello* at Drury Lane, when he first visited England; together we delighted in *Trial by Jury* during its first run at the Royalty. And shall we ever forget that evening in the parterre of the Français, when Bornier's *La Fille de Roland* was the novelty of the hour? It was our first visit to Paris, and we knew nothing of the French stage; so when Roland's daughter glided upon the scene, a snow-white, willowy figure

with lustrous eyes, we looked at our programme with a sudden access of curiosity, and read for the first time the name of Sarah Bernhardt."

In "English Dramatists of To-Day" Mr. Archer has some interesting things to say about the early days of Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. *The Lights o' London* meets with acceptance in that it is an admirable melodrama as a melodrama. H. J. Byron's work receives no half-hearted scourging, and there appears to be every justification for it. Mr. Archer regards Gilbert's *Palace of Truth* in a favourite light, and he commends its author for his adventures into the region of fantasy.

There is a small parchment-bound book so slight that it might easily be overlooked

by the closest scrutiniser of any fair-sized library, but it is a booklet that contains a reasoned estimate and a balanced critical study of "Henry Irving: Actor and Manager." Irving's two great assets, we are told, were his personality and his intensity. To weigh against these there were his mannerisms, the outcome of lack of training. He never taught himself graceful action, and, as he was rarely at rest on the stage, quite unable to keep still, his shambling walk had all the appearance of his having "lost command of his legs," and was accompanied by "sidelong and backward skirmishings." Again, he was defective in speech and deficient in mimetic power. He thrilled his audiences more by terror than by the wings of passion or pathos. He was not

an inspired actor. "It was his face and his brain that made him what he was—his glittering eye and his restless, inventive intellect."

The first full and accurate account of the actor, Macready's whole life is given in Mr. Archer's most able monograph, "William Charles Macready." Of special interest to Scottish readers are the visits paid to Scotland by the celebrated actor. In the summer and autumn of 1813 young Macready appeared in Glasgow as Captain Plume, Doricourt, Puff, Young Marlow, and Mark Antony in *Julius Cæsar*. "The first serious quarrel between father and son [the latter the subject of the monograph] took place at the close of the Glasgow season." He returned to Glasgow again in the early spring of 1815, when he first

met his future wife, "a pretty little girl, about nine years of age," who acted with him, and whom he scolded "for being imperfect in her part." During his next visit to Scotland, in the summer of 1819, he appeared in Edinburgh for the first time, but we are told that the public there always received him with scant cordiality. In the summer of 1820 he visited Aberdeen, Montrose, Dundee, and Perth. After the first performance of Talfourd's *Ion*, in 1835, a supper was given at the author's house in celebration of his birthday, and Macready sat at table "between Wordsworth and Landor, with Browning opposite." It will be remembered that Browning's play, *Strafford*, is dedicated to Macready from his affectionate friend. Mr. Archer has

been painstaking in his interesting chapter on Macready's management at Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres. Among Macready's triumphs in acting were Rob Roy, Richard III., Virginius, William Tell, and Werner. In Paris he received homage and praise from George Sand, Eugène Delacroix, Alexandre Dumas, Eugène Sue, and, it is rumoured, from Victor Hugo. Mr. Archer's summary of Macready's art and character is a noble one. "Had it been Macready's habit to look at the bright side of things, he must have recognised, in later life, that his upward path was from the first made singularly smooth for him; . . . few actors have been more uniformly fate-befriended. . . . Had he been capable of happiness, he might

have been the happiest of men." His personal ugliness is confirmed from various sources, but "his face seems to have been one that . . . in old age became venerable and most impressive." He had no natural grace or comeliness, for his motions were abrupt, but his voice was fine and rich. He had an impressive personality, not a little given to pride and a strange melancholy, and while buoyant in youth he grew gloomy in old age. Irritability was also strong in him, and he was inclined to write depreciatingly of the acting profession. He was always attentive to details in his productions. Nearly all his life there was a struggle between his higher and lower natures, but the most lovable trait in his character was his strong domestic affection.

"The Theatrical 'World,' 1893," is a precious record of a wonderful year in dramatic history. In that year there were productions in London of Ibsen plays, Tennyson's *Becket*, and *Diplomacy*. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* took the theatrical and social worlds by storm, and, if for nothing else, this volume would be valuable on account of Mr. Archer's keen criticism of this play. Due to some misunderstanding between Mr. Archer and Mr. Clement Scott, the critic, we come across a passage where Mr. Archer, in referring to this difference, contrasts scathingly the appreciation of humour by Scotsmen and Englishmen. "I owe Mr. Clement Scott a personal apology. In common with a great many other people, I mistook for an

accusation of plagiarism* what was, it appears, only a piece of airy badinage, of raillery, of 'banter'! I did not, and, to be quite frank, I do not to this day, see the joke; but that is doubtless because I am a Scotchman. I can only plead that many unimpeachable Englishmen were equally dense."

Mr. Archer's "Poets of the Younger Generation" is a voluminous book, and is the result, I should think, of much study. He trips up the late Stephen Phillips on account of his eccentric metres and defective ear. He considers Phillips's two main defects are "a tendency to dismiss a

* "Many a shaft, at random sent,
Finds mark the Archer little meant!"
—Scott, *The Lord of the Isles*, Canto V., st. 18.

This quotation is from Sir Walter Scott, of course, not from Mr. Clement Scott.

critical process of thought or feeling in a few phrases," which, "however pregnant, must never be carried too far," and an "over-inflation of style or overstrained grandiloquence." However, Mr. Archer is quick to realize that his qualities as a dramatic poet are "rapidity of action and splendour of style," and that he has excelled himself in *Paolo and Francesca*, a play which, partly on account of the skilfully-handled "Galeoto fú il libro" scene, has received praise from Mr. Archer in more than one place in his criticisms. Among other poets dealt with in the book are Laurence Binyon, John Davidson, Richard Le Gallienne, A. E. Housman, Rudyard Kipling, Sir Henry Newbolt, Arthur Symons, Sir William Watson, and W. B. Yeats.

"Play-Making" is a work that serves as a remarkable example of how Mr. Archer builds up, piece by piece, his case. There are logic, and precision, and sound reason in his suggestions and arguments, and they are so presented that they appeal as inevitably convincing and final. Though he insists that this book be regarded as one of practical suggestion rather than of critical appreciation, he has, not unnaturally, turned aside here and there into critical paths, and the work is thus scholarly as well as instructive. The practical standpoint is ever kept in view, perchance to the detriment of the purely æsthetic side. Such a touch of insight as is conveyed in these few words is worth pages of exposition. "Negative instruction is in its essence more desirable than

positive. The latter tends to make us mere imitators, whereas the former, in saving us from dangers, leaves our originality unimpaired." The plays, one gathers, that seem to meet the demands of construction most successfully are *Œdipus Rex*, *Othello*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Master Builder*, *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *Iris*, and *His House in Order*. "To my personal taste," Mr. Archer writes, "one of the keenest forms of theatrical enjoyment is that of seeing the curtain go up on a picture of perfect tranquillity, wondering from what quarter the drama is going to arise, and then watching it gather on the horizon like a cloud no bigger than a man's hand." "Play-Making" is written largely for those who aspire to become playwrights,

but it indicates so many minute pitfalls and difficulties that lie ready for the unwary apprentice that, in spite of Mr. Archer's sincerity and encouragement, a reading of this book might send away the most sanguine aspirant with the idea that the game is not worth the candle.

As editor and translator of the great Scandinavian dramatist, Mr. Archer's introducing Ibsen's works to this country has been a case of casting pearls before swine, but it has had the salutary effect of at least focussing (though from the nature of the case in an unavoidably sensational manner) serious attention on the plays from many outside of the thinking and reading class of playgoers. In Mr. Archer's sound introductions to the Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen (1907-1908), there are one

or two delightful scenes of his friendship with the master dramatist. I have endeavoured to piece them together into a composite picture. "No one who ever saw Henrik Ibsen, in his later years at any rate, could doubt that he was a born aristocrat. It is said that a change came over his appearance and manner after the publication of *Brand*—that he then put off the Bohemian and put on the reserved, correct, punctilious man-of-the-world. When I first saw him in 1881, he had the air of a polished statesman or diplomatist. Distinction was the note of his personality. . . . In 1887 Ibsen spent the summer at Frederikshavn and at Saeby in the north of Jutland, not far from the Skaw. At Saeby I visited him. . . . I remember that he enlarged to me at great length on

the fascination which the sea exercised over him." Remarking on the supposed resemblance of Dr. Stockmann in *An Enemy of the People* to Ibsen himself, Mr. Archer says, "The very fact that Dr. Stockmann was to utter much of his own indignation and many of his own ideas forced him to make the worthy doctor in temperament and manner as unlike himself as possible. Now boisterous geniality, loquacity, irrepressible rashness of utterance, and a total absence of self-criticism and self-irony were the very contradiction of the poet's own characteristics—at any rate, after he had entered upon middle life. . . . The very effort to disguise himself naturally led him to attribute to his protagonist and mouthpiece a great superficial amiability.

I am far from implying that Ibsen's own character was essentially unamiable; it would ill become one whom he always treated with the utmost kindness to say or think anything of the kind. But his amiability was not superficial, effusive, exuberant; it seldom reached that boiling point which we call geniality. . . . I well remember his saying to me, while he was engaged on *The Lady from the Sea*, 'I hope to have some tomfoolery [*galskab*] ready for next year.' . . . When [in September, 1899] I met Ibsen (for the last time) he told me that he was actually at work on a new play, which he thought of calling a 'Dramatic Epilogue' [*When We Dead Awaken*]." In a masterly criticism of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in "The Theatrical 'World,' 1893,"

in which he compares the Nora of Signora Duse with the Nora of Miss Achurch, Mr. Archer remarks that "No one who has ever had to do with staging a play of Ibsen's, can doubt that any essential departure from the 'business' he prescribes, is a departure for the worse."

In order to defend or controvert certain topical questions of to-day, one feels Mr. Archer has been, perhaps, too readily inclined to rush into print, but among what may be classed his miscellaneous writings two contributions to our dramatic literature call for observance. That handsome compilation of endless research and industry, "Shakespeare's England," is enhanced in no mean degree by the historical and well-considered chap. xxv., entitled "The Playhouse," in the writing

of which paper Mr. Archer has had the collaboration of Mr. W. J. Lawrence. In Dr. Brandes's "Shakespeare," the First Book and half of the Second Book are translated by Mr. Archer, and the last half of the Second Book is also translated by him, assisted by Miss Mary Morison.

A statement of fact does not invariably receive the credence that is its due, and it is, indeed, almost incredible to realize, that for all his exceptional powers as critic, biographer, and interpreter, there is not one single volume by Mr. Archer that one can point to as a definitely fixed work of compelling distinction, not one work that has captivated the popular imagination. It is a peculiar, a striking, and a deplorable fact. His works exist,

and their existence seems to be taken for granted without any further inquiry or reference. One deeply regrets this fact, for, as I have endeavoured to show, there are any number of highly interesting, not to say entirely entertaining, chapters and pages in his best work. Moreover, Mr. Archer is an authority who writes with an expert's knowledge of all sides of theatrical enterprise. Hear him lay forth on stage-management and stage-production, on salaries, contracts, and the business methods of the box office, on gesticulation and voice-production, on adaptation of plays and on dialogue and style in plays, on the structure of the theatre and on lighting and scenery, on properties and costumes, on 'stage business' and 'make-up'—on all these points he is an

independent thinker, and he is tied down neither by schools nor movements, neither by fashions nor prejudices. What modern dramatic critic has equipped himself so commodiously on the historical side? Here, for example, is a kind of historical passage common to his works. "With us a three-act play will often constitute an 'entire evening's entertainment'; fifty years ago the public would have felt defrauded had the manager offered them less than six acts, and did not complain of seven or eight. 'Curtain-raisers' were unknown. The solid pudding always headed the bill of fare, with a more or less liberal dessert to follow."—*Life of Macready*, chap. v., p. 112. Again, read him on the actors of yesterday, Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, Talma, Rachel, Betterton,

Kemble, and Kean. He can talk out of a full knowledge of plays and playwrights. "No playwright of really commanding talent was ever tyrannized over by his actors, though the greatest playwrights, from Shakespeare downwards, have not disdained to fit particular actors with parts 'cut to their measure.'"—*Life of Macready*, chap. iv., p. 75.

In short, here is a dramatic historian who can place before you records of outstanding theatrical seasons in the annals of the theatre, the lengths of runs of plays, who can descant on Greek drama and classic plays such as Scribe's and Racine's, on burlesques, farces, Victorian melodramas, and old-fashioned plays, on the light fantasies of Barrie, and Gilbert, and of Gilbert and

Sullivan, on French seventeenth- and eighteenth-century plays, like Molière's, and on opera-bouffe. Mr. Archer also knows the histories and careers of most theatres, of the Lyceum during Irving's time and the

> "Houses twain
> Of Covent Garden and of Drury Lane,"

in Macready's time. The various kinds of acting, from the highest form of it in character and heroic parts down to the catchpenny showman style, have not escaped his attention. He can even place himself on the stage and analyse the psychology of an average audience. At the express desire of many notable men of letters, scholars, dramatists, actors, and managers he has acted as sage adviser, and his wisdom in dramatic matters has rarely, if ever, been found wanting.

Such is Mr. William Archer who, for close on forty years, has strenuously devoted his energies to establish in this country serious dramatic criticism of the legitimate stage. One hesitates whether it is a greater compliment to state that Mr. William Archer is the Brander Matthews of this country or to say that Professor Brander Matthews is the William Archer of America. However that may be, the happier state of reformation in the theatre that at present exists, such as the Repertory Theatre movement, has been due in no small measure to this untiring dramatic director, whose mind is richer in sound reason and balanced insight than we ever remember to have observed in any other dramatic critic (with the possible exception of Brander Matthews) of our modern age and generation.

X.

A Modern Elizabethan

R. B. Cunninghame Graham

IT has become generally recognized that the majority of widely-travelled people, if they are not out-and-out liars or something like strangers to the truth, are at least on familiar terms with exaggeration, or, as it is otherwise styled, the process of "drawing the long bow." Mr. Cunninghame Graham, as a scrupulous literary artist and a traveller combined, has proved by his unerring observation and verisimilitude of detail that he can convince even the most unbelieving trooper that ever walked God's earth. His imagination is at one and the same time iridescent and persuasive. Cunninghame Graham! What transports of delight in fresh,

wild life that name conjures up!—scenes of

"Antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven;"

the grey ruggedness of Scotland, the sunny stretches of Spain, the cruel sand wastes of Morocco, and the arid pampas of South America.

Mr. Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham was born in 1852, the elder son of William Cunninghame Grahame Bontine of Ardoch, near Cardross in Dunbartonshire, and Gartmore, near the Lake of Menteith in West Perthshire, and of the Hon. Anne Elizabeth, the fourth daughter of Admiral the Hon. Charles Elphinstone Fleeming of Cumbernauld, Lanarkshire, and sister of the 14th Baron Elphinstone. He was educated at Harrow.

In 1879 he married Gabriela, the daughter of Don Francisco José de la Balmondière. Their married life lasted for twenty-seven years, as his wife died in 1906. Always keenly interested in politics, in which his views are outspokenly Socialistic, Mr. Cunninghame Graham contested N.W. Lanarkshire in 1882, was M.P. for North Lanarkshire, 1886-1892, and contested the Camlachie Division of Glasgow in 1892. His most important literary works are "Notes on the District of Menteith" (1895); "Aurora la Cujiñi, a Realistic Sketch in Seville" (1898); Mogreb-el-Acksa, a journey in Morocco" (1898); "The Ipané" (1899); "Thirteen Stories" (1900); "Success" (1902); "Progress" (1905); "His People" (1906); "Hope" (1910); "A Hatchment" (1913); "Scot-

tish Stories" (1914); and "Brought Forward" (1916). These volumes are composed of travel sketches, stories, and essays.

"Mogreb-el-Acksa" is noteworthy on account of its having formed the basis of Mr. Bernard Shaw's Moroccan play, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion.* We will leave Mr. Shaw to speak for himself (in which obligation he is never at a loss). He conveys a valuable personal impression of Mr. Cunninghame Graham. "Cunninghame Graham," he says, "is the hero of his own book; but I have not made him the hero of my play, because so incredible a personage must have destroyed its likelihood—such as it is. There are moments when I do not myself believe in his existence. And yet he must be real;

for I have seen him with these eyes; and I am one of the few men living who can decipher the curious alphabet in which he writes his private letters. The man is on public record too. The battle of Trafalgar Square, in which he personally and bodily assailed civilization as represented by the concentrated military and constabular forces of the capital of the world, can scarcely be forgotten by the more discreet spectators, of whom I was one. . . . He is a fascinating mystery to a sedentary person like myself. The horse, a dangerous animal whom, when I cannot avoid, I propitiate with apples and sugar, he bestrides and dominates fearlessly, yet with a true republican sense of the rights of the four-legged fellow-creature whose martyrdom, and man's shame therein, he

has told most powerfully in his Calvary, a tale with an edge that will cut the soft cruel hearts and strike fire from the hard kind ones. He handles the other lethal weapons as familiarly as the pen: medieval sword and modern Mauser are to him as umbrellas and kodaks are to me. . . . He is, I understand, a Spanish hidalgo: hence the superbity of his portrait by Lavery (Velasquez being no longer available). He is, I know, a Scotch laird. How he contrives to be authentically the two things at the same time is no more intelligible to me than the fact that everything that has ever happened to him seems to have happened in Paraguay or Texas instead of in Spain or Scotland. He is, I regret to add, an impenitent and unashamed dandy: such boots, such a hat,

would have dazzled D'Orsay himself. With that hat he once saluted me in Regent Street when I was walking with my mother. Her interest was instantly kindled; and the following conversation ensued. 'Who is that?' 'Cunninghame Graham.' 'Nonsense! Cunninghame Graham is one of your Socialists: that man is a gentleman.' This is the punishment of vanity, a fault I have myself always avoided, as I find conceit less troublesome and much less expensive. Later on somebody told him of Tarudant, a city in Morocco in which no Christian had ever set foot. Concluding at once that it must be an exceptionally desirable place to live in, he took ship and horse; changed the hat for a turban; and made straight for the sacred city, via Mogador.

How he fared, and how he fell into the hands of the Cadi of Kintafi, who rightly held that there was more danger to Islam in one Cunninghame Graham than in a thousand Christians, may be learnt from his account of it in Mogreb-el-Acksa, without which Captain Brassbound's Conversion would never have been written."

Mr. Cunninghame Graham's literary work has been characterized as that of the Scottish Maupassant. His style has a freshening touch of virility that strikes an unmistakable note of health. To employ the appropriate figurative lingo, he gives full rein to his vivid imagination yet with scarcely a hint anywhere of unbridled passions. He rarely mounts his high horse unless it be to pour scorn on some absurd modern social fetish.

When he lingers for a while, on his travels, it is before the setting sun when, having raced the sun neck for neck, as it were, he alights from his saddle and settles himself to a well-earned smoke ; and it is then that the vanished arcadias crowd into his reflections, and he sets him the pleasant task of inscribing nocturnes of regret over that past which lives on in the mind but which can never more be a reality. Most of these sobbing songs of long ago vent themselves in "Scottish Stories" where the eccentric old Scottish characters of a past generation are limned by an endearing hand. He has a deep and an abiding love for those old worthies, just as he has an attachment for some old, neglected haunt that tells its story in its moss-grown silence, and there

are such unforgettable silences in "A Princess," "A Braw Day," and "Caisteal-na-Sithan" where "crows winged their way, looking like notes of music on an old page of parchment, across the leaden sky." That is his reflective side only, because he has proved in one of his better-known sketches, "Beattock for Moffat," that he has a sense for dramatic situation. He finds it, however, as difficult to pause for very long on these homely pictures as to resist the call of the wilds in South America, so that once more at the rising of the sun it is "boot, saddle, to horse, and away!" bounding over the wind-swept prairies.

To turn at random to any of his collected stories and sketches, to, say, "Thirteen Stories" or "Success" or "Progress,"

produces a sensation of awe and obeisance before this high priest in the temple of Colour, "the soul's bridegroom," as a certain genius has happily phrased it. The man of letters stands out clearly in his pure, fastidious, restrained style and in his strict attention to the use of words, especially foreign words. The colour and atmosphere of the Argentine and the River Plate saturate his pages; and who is happier than he, this valiant horseman, mounted on a superb Barbary roan, riding over sierras and pampas. It is no "spavined" mare he rides. The sweet air seems to sing around him, the rhythmic cadence of the rider invades the very prose he writes, and the blood courses freer and fuller as the leagues upon leagues of ground are covered.

As did noble, generous Cortes, he rides like a centaur, and his "prince of palfreys trots the air and makes the earth sing when he touches it—the basest horn of his hoof is more musical than the pipe of Hermes. . . . It is a beast for Perseus: he is pure air and fire. . . . His neigh is like the bidding of a monarch, and his countenance enforces homage. . . . Nay, the man hath no wit that cannot, from the rising of the lark to the lodging of the lamb, vary deserved praise on the palfrey: it is a theme as fluent as the sea." In many of his South American sketches, and particularly in the ones called "Success" and that merciless piece of irony called "Calvary," his attitude is the kind of full-blooded defiance in which

that other modern Elizabethan, Henley, used to revel. Again his irony towards humanity finds outlet in his denunciation of missionaries sent out to convert the heathen of savage lands and in his contempt for the material success of modern civilization; the wonderful preface to "Progress" expresses his views on progress and success. "Failure alone is interesting." What is perhaps most striking in his best sketches, such as "Success," "Los Seguidores," "From the Mouth of the Sahara," and "La Tapera," is his suave melancholy that acts as a depression, a momentary relief, from his altitudes of virility. Equally interesting are the vivid pictures of this gringo's dealings with the gauchos. It is on his sagas of the saddle, rather

than on his Scottish subjects, fraught though they be with an unique wistfulness, that Mr. Cunninghame Graham's fame is assured. On the saddle he is at home, and writing on equitation calls out his sympathies and literary powers. He stops to call your attention to the shyness of horses, of even wild horses that require to be caught with the lasso. He knows the use of bolas and of a hundred other kindred implements of sport and common usage in South American wild life. After an adventurous ride by tropical forests of lianas and ñandubays, sighting on the way ostriches and parroquets, tortoises and flamingoes, at the hot noontide he may draw up at a rancho to drink maté, while

the burning sun shines down like brass. Without hesitation I should say it would be very difficult to discover a passage in his own works, and almost as difficult to find one among many present-day works, to match this passage from "Los Seguidores." "Night followed day, the scanty twilight scarcely intervening, the hot sun sinking red upon the low horizon as at sea, and in an instant the whole world changed from a yellow sun-burnt waste to a cool shadow, from the depths of which the cries of animals ascended to the unhearing sky which overhung them like a deep blue inverted bowl flecked with a thousand stars. . . . *Again night yielded up its mysteries to the dawn, advancing, conquering and*

flushed with power."* The hush of nightfall on lonely spots; the tinkling of bells in the dusky distance; the first radiance of the dawn; here eating jerked beef and there riding "through forest, over baking plain, up mountain paths, . . . splashing through marshes, the water reaching up to the horse's girths"; the customs and superstitions of primitive foreign races; the unconventional peoples and surroundings he knows and loves so well; and, not least, the poignant sentiments of these uncivilised and ignorant races, whose failure and backwardness in the march of human progress are more interesting to him and better understood by him than the worshipped success of a

* I have placed this sentence in italics to draw particular attention to its beauty.

boasted civilization—all these themes he treats with supreme mastery. Like his *confrère* in literature, Conrad, of whose unrivalled powers he was one of the first to take note, he is fascinated by mysterious waterways that seem to lose themselves in wending their courses and carrying men's secrets to the vast, open sea. The Argentine, Brazil, and Paraguay, "through the Chiquitos, across the Uruquay, in the forests of the Andes," and the Rio Grande, he has travelled in these parts with more than an ordinary traveller's eyes, and the feast these scenes have been to his eyes is transmitted, by pen and ink and printed page, to ours with, one feels sure, little having been lost in the process.

Deplore it as we may well do, the fact remains that in his latest book,

"Brought Forward," he has made his farewell bow before the drop curtain, and present-day art is, indeed, the poorer for his departure from the arena of letters. He has bequeathed to this century artistic impressions of healthy, sane, open-air life on sierra and prairie and desert that will take their place side by side with the works of his two brother impressionists of elemental life—Joseph Conrad and W. H. Hudson. With the Scottish sketches in "Brought Forward" I have the feeling that somehow they never get under way, but his South American scenes have still the freshness and romance, as of yore. The most beautifully coloured sketches are "El Tango Argentino," "In a Backwater," "El Masgad," and the sumptuous "Feast Day in Santa Maria Mayor."

A lingering touch of regret, as of leaving a well-loved land, lends a sad, flickering hue to "Bopicuá." "It is not given to all men after a break of years to come back to the scenes of youth, and still find in them the same zest as of old. To return again to all the cares of life called civilised, with all its littlenesses, its newspapers all full of nothing, its sordid aims disguised under high-sounding nicknames, its hideous riches and its sordid poverty, its want of human sympathy, and, above all, its barbarous war brought on it by the folly of its rulers, was not just at that moment an alluring thought, as I felt the little 'malacara' [white-faced horse] that I rode twitching his bridle, striving to be off. When I had touched him with the spur he bounded forward and . . . the place which for

so many months had been part of my life sank out of sight, just as an island in the Tropics fades from view as the ship leaves it, as it were, hull down." And, as he rides off, Mr. Cunninghame Graham seems to shout back over his shoulder his noble and graceful "Adios" in these words, "'Tis meet and fitting to set free the horse or pen before death overtakes you, or before the gentle public turns its thumbs down and yells, 'Away with him!' . . . Hold it not up to me for egotism, O gentle reader, for I would have you know that hardly any of the horses that I rode had shoes on them, and thus the tracks are faint."

It is rare in modern times to come across a person who unites in himself, so equally and so superbly poised, the man of

action and the man of letters. He is one, among few, who, on account of his picturesque personality, can dress unconventionally without the least hint of affectation. Like a handsome sentinel he would grace the threshold of a desert caravanserai, and I myself have assuredly seen him adorn a railway compartment. In appearance he is a curious blend of the North and the South. His figure is a composite picture of a Spanish grandee and the Dutch "Laughing Cavalier," with an additional combination of Cervantes plus that master's Don Quixote. And what more natural to this appreciator of things Spanish than that he should look like Cervantes? But most of all there is Sir Philip Sidney reincarnated in him. As a matter of fact, the more one compares him

with Sidney the closer the resemblance appears—both men of affairs, horsemen, idealists; both chivalrous and possessed of great personal charm; both the possessors of free, passionate minds. They handle delicately their beauties of vision and of words. They glory far more in defending a lost cause than in attaining personal success. In a world "where dream and practice meet" they strive to free it from those who would unconsciously shackle it by hide-bound conventions. Mr. Cunninghame Graham's views are nothing if not healthily unconventional. One imagines him "swaggering" in the days of Elizabeth, decked in silk doublet and trunk hose, and beruffled, gracefully manipulating a rapier-thrust and footing it gaily in a galliard or a coranto—

a Sir Philip Sidney to the life. His love of colours and conceits, of horsemanship and adventure, are essentially traits of the golden age of good Queen Bess. The noble head tossed back with a quick impulsive action like that of a fresh, young animal at bay, a head-wind, it would seem, trembling through his hair just as it might sweep through a wheatfield, and his imperious moustachios and beard that might be the pride of a Philip of Spain complete the gallant headpiece of this Elizabethan of modern times.

XI

A Princely Decadent

John Davidson

THE opening scene in the tragic history of John Davidson took place at Barrhead, Renfrewshire, on 11th April, 1857, when he was born into a world in which he was apparently destined to become sorrow's close friend. On the day of the event one can imagine a lashing onslaught of rain and frolicsome wind against the window-panes, as though Spring wept "her golden tears" at the advent of an additional member to a humanity that walks "hand in hand with trouble." This unhappy babe, one fears, must have been ushered in when the malignant atomies, goblins, Tylwyth Teg, or what you will, were presiding at Life's feast. There is even a strange irony in

the fact that this future decadent and revolutionary poet was the son of a minister of the Evangelical Union, the Rev. Alexander Davidson. Perhaps we may assume that his father removed from Barrhead to Greenock, but be that as it may, Davidson was sent to an elementary school known as the Highlanders' Academy, in Greenock. From 1870 to 1871 he was an assistant in the chemical laboratory of Walker's sugar house in Greenock, and in the following year, 1871-1872, he was assistant to the Greenock town analyst. Then, at the early age of fifteen, he commenced upon his varied career as schoolmaster. After four years as a pupil teacher at the Highlanders' Academy, Greenock, 1872 - 1876, he attended Edinburgh University for the

session of 1876-1877. He next taught in Alexander's Charity, Glasgow, 1877-1878, in which years respectively he completed his first plays, "An Unhistorical Pastoral" and "A Romantic Farce," though their first appearance was in Greenock as late as 1889. At Perth Academy, 1878-1881, he proved himself an efficient teacher of English, and from there he wended his way to the Kelvinside Academy, Glasgow, where he remained during 1881-1882. Hutchison's Charity, in Paisley, next claimed him for the year 1883-1884. All this time his attention seems to have been given to writing poetic plays, for in 1884-1885, when he was employed as a clerk by a Glasgow thread firm, he completed "Bruce: A Chronicle Play," which was issued in Glasgow in 1886. In 1885 he

returned to the teaching profession, and went to Morrison's Academy, Crieff. In this same year he married Margaret, daughter of John M'Arthur, Perth. I have been told that when at Crieff he took particular interest in presiding over the productions of school plays, and that he paid very strict attention to elocution. At Crieff he completed "Smith: A Tragic Farce," in 1886, which was issued in Glasgow in 1888. The dates 1888 to 1889 denote when he concluded his cycle of years as schoolmaster, finishing where he began, in Greenock, as a teacher in a private school that, I believe, no longer exists. When at Crieff, Davidson had completed in 1888 another play, "Scaramouch in Naxos: A Pantomime," which appeared in Greenock in 1889. Seventeen

years spent first in a laboratory and then at the desk of schoolmaster and clerk—one cannot but think that this early part of his career was a particularly strange and inharmonious rearing-ground for a poet with the curious temperamental sensibility that Davidson possessed.

And then Davidson went to London in 1890, and for some time wrote reviews and articles for the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Speaker*. Journalism won his attention, though his poetic outbursts from time to time showed that he was far from neglecting the muse. He tried his hand at one or two novels without success. In 1893 the publication of his "Fleet Street Eclogues" announced that the work of an unusual poet had risen into the firmament of modern verse and demanded public

interest. This claim was somewhat strengthened a year later, when "Songs and Ballads" appeared. It was then that Davidson showed what wonderful narrative powers and beauty of utterance he had at his command in such pieces as "A Ballad of Heaven," "A Ballad of Hell," "A Ballad of a Nun," the one poem by which Davidson will probably be remembered, and "A Ballad of Blank Verse." All these pieces are written in old ballad measure with a modern theme and outlook running through them. Davidson made this particular ballad form his own, and, it may be asserted, no one is likely to rival him in this very individual achievement. "New Ballads" followed in 1896, and in 1901 there issued the series of Testaments—"The Testament

of a Vivisector," "The Testament of a Man Forbid," "The Testament of an Empire-Builder," "The Testament of a Prime Minister," and "The Testament of John Davidson." The most enduring of his poems are contained in the "Selected Poems of John Davidson," published in 1904. His later works are "The Theatrocrat" (1905); "Holiday and Other Poems" (1906); "The Triumph of Mammon" (1907); and "Mammon and His Message" (1908). In 1896 he produced "For the Crown," an English verse adaptation of François Coppée's drama, "Pour la couronne" (acted by Forbes-Robertson and Mrs. Patrick Campbell), which was successful, and was revived in 1905.

Though no one would think to ques-

tion the fresh luxuriance of his verse, at the same time it is hampered, now here and now there, by the three somewhat incompatible attitudes that characterize the general trend of most of his work—the attitudes of the pedagogue, the philosopher, and the decadent revolutionary. It is difficult to pin down a fluttering butterfly, and there is something capricious and beautiful that flits about the lyrical and lighter strains from Davidson's lyre that one cannot analyse. It was, no doubt, so much compensation for the uncongenial surroundings of his earlier days and also something of a relief from their "useless treadmill creak" to escape from them to join the butterflies that constituted the group of decadent poets in the eighteen-nineties. But he never forgot how such

occupations as teaching and clerking may wear the fine edge off one's soul and may injure, or even enfeeble, the imagination. The delights of London appear to have been short-lived; misunderstood and unrecognised by the larger public, sorrow again took this unhappy man to her bosom; and earth was less than ever "a pleasant inn of dreams." From his Fleet Street window Davidson saw the world with queer, cynical eyes—a world of

> ". . . would-bes, theorists,
> Artistic natures, foiled reformers, knaves
> And fools incompetent or overbold,
> Broken evangelists and debauchees,
> Inebriates, criminals, cowards, virtual knaves . . .
> The glowing blast, the fire-shot smoke . . .
> The mammoth hammer's pounding stroke . . .
> The chink of gold, the labourer's groans,
> The infant's wail, the woman's sob."

Out of these sordid visions, when the time was spent "in making hay by thrashing

straw in Fleet Street," he formed his materialistic philosophy of life. Everything was to be set up anew—a new poetry and literature, new systems of civilization, nay a new world itself, and, having given up all accepted deities, he must needs create an entirely new god, Nietzsche's ideal—the Superman.

> "Nothing beneath, about us, or above
> Is higher than ourselves." . . .
>
> "Soul, disregard
> The bad, the good;
> Be haughty, hard,
> Misunderstood.
>
> "When curse and stone
> Are hissed and hurled,
> Aloof, alone
> Disdain the world. . .
>
> "Dethrone the past;
> Deed, vision—naught
> Avails at last
> Save your own thought,"

or, as one of Davidson's characters says,

> "No creed for me! I am a man apart:
> A mouthpiece for the creeds of all the world.'

Thus, as one of the first out-and-out Nietzscheans in this country, Davidson advanced the idea of the Superman, and he kept staunch to his views. This is the theme of his later works, and it is expounded with what Mr. Archer calls "the Scotchman's passion for debate," and what we are inclined to name the pedagogic style of argument.

To view Davidson's non-philosophical verse, his purer poetry, is, of course, an easier matter. As regards his plays, Mr. Archer, with his usual sagacity, concludes that Davidson is ignorant of the essential nature of drama, and that in his verse, as a whole, there is "the presence of fire and the absence of finish." To this I would add that there is in a prominent degree

a princeliness in his music, and that such lines as—

> "Sometimes it was a wandering wind,
> Sometimes the fragrance of the pine, . . .
> . . . .
> That turned her sweet blood into wine."
>
> "On many a mountain's happy head
> Dawn lightly laid her rosy hand."
>
> "The cuckoo pealed his mellow chime."
>
> "My soul with peace, as heaven with light
> O'erflows when morning crowns the hills."
>
> "Still the sun
> With fire-shod feet shall step from hill to hill
> Downward before the night."
>
> "To come at night under the desert moon
> On pillars, ghostly porches, temples, towers
> Silent for centuries; to see at dawn
> The shadow of the Arab on the sand."
>
> "Nor is there a divining-rod for kings
> To tell the hearts of gold."
>
> "Beside the sounding threshold of the sea."
>
> "And the day go out by the western gate."

—are memorable; they have a richness as of sparkling wine. In judging his work one is forced to admit a weak-

ness in technique generally, and in "A Loafer" and "Thirty Bob a Week" his realism, like Masefield's sometimes, is too strong to have any beauty in it. "Song of a Train" is original and approaches sufficiently near the rhythm of railway motion to meet with acceptance. "Romney Marsh" and "A Cinque Port" are infused with an unusually healthy atmosphere for Davidson. The ballads of Tannhaüser, Euthanasia, and Lancelot are written with a Pre-Raphaelite profusion of detail and a Botticellian opulence of colour, producing an intricate tapestry of subtly-woven design. At one time Davidson, I imagine, must have been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by Tennyson, and one of his finest stanzas is the Tenny-

sonian last stanza of the beautiful "Serenade"—

> "Deep and sweet she sleeps
> Because of her love for me;
> And deep and sweet the peace that keeps
> My happy heart in fee!
> Peace on the heights, in the deeps,
> Peace over hill and lea,
> Peace through the star-lit steeps,
> Peace on the star-lit sea,
> Because a simple maiden sleeps
> Dreaming a dream of me!"

Again, there is a Miltonic splendour in these lines from "The Testament of an Empire-Builder"—

> "A loom of strings or grove of tuneful pipes
> I nowhere saw; only in Heaven's midst
> The jewelled keyboard on a jasper plinth,
> And that celestial one who played thereon."

Davidson had an eye for scenery, and a picture of Edinburgh and Lothian occurs in "Lammas," in the second series of "Fleet Street Eclogues,"

where Ninian describes how he stood

"On Arthur's Seat. The chill and brindled fog
That plumed the Bass and belted Berwick Law,
That hung with ghostly tapestry the stones
Of bleak Tantallon, from the windy Forth,
Noiseless and dim, speeds by the pier of Leith,
And by Leith Walk, its dreary channel old,
To flood the famous city, Edinburgh. . . .
The fair green hollow over Salisbury Crags; . . .
The rock-piled castle . . .
St. Giles's garland-crown studded with gems.
A bell rings faintly; curled and braided smoke
O'erhangs the humming Canongate, and flings
Dusky festoons that wither as they fall
About the washed towers of Holyrood."

There is quite the Newbolt ring in "A Runnable Stag" and a healthy strain in "Merry England," both poems included in the volume called "Holiday and Other Poems." It is interesting to note that the four lines

"Night and day! night and day!
Sound the song the hours rehearse!
Work and play! work and play!
The order of the universe!"

which appear in the poem, "Piper, Play!" were originally written, much earlier, for a "Holiday Song" when Davidson was at Morrison's Academy, Crieff.

In whatever light Davidson's personality be considered, it cannot escape notice how singularly free it was of prejudice and hypocrisy. You may not care for his egotism or for his ambitious pretentions, but you cannot deny that he often penetrates uncannily to the core of things, though the process be ever so unpleasant and pessimistic. He was, of course, much more than merely unconventional; he was decadent. The temperament that draws nearer to despair with each day in the life of its possessor, the temperament that has no solid force behind it, he had; and his views

formed themselves finally into the unstable topsy-turvydom of a man sickened and chagrined by the world and its ways, and alone finding satisfaction in crying for the moon.

For some time before leaving London for Penzance, Cornwall, Davidson lived in Streatham, and he was fond of taking regular walks in the immediate neighbourhood. At Penzance he was provided with a Civil List pension of £100, granted to him in 1906, which, as his writings probably earned him small profit, one would scarcely regard as a sufficient reward for his literary labours. On 23rd March, 1909, he disappeared. It was concluded that he had taken his life, presumably he had drowned himself, for six months later his body was discovered

in the sea. Thus at Land's End he found World's End. He has written his own requiem in the poem entitled "The Last Journey"—

"I felt the world a-spinning on its nave,
I felt it sheering blindly round the sun;
I felt the time had come to find a grave;
I knew it by my heart my days were done.
I took my staff in hand; I took the road,
And wandered out to seek my last abode.
. . . . .

"Farewell the hope that mocked, farewell despair,
That went before me still and made the pace.
The earth is full of graves, and mine was there
Before my life began, my resting place;
And I shall find it out and with the dead
Lie down for ever, all my saying said——

"Deeds all done and songs all sung,
While others chant in sun and rain,
'Heel and toe from dawn to dusk,
Round the world and home again.'"

So to this day perhaps one may hear this dirge chanted by the breezes when the surging seas fret themselves defiantly round by St. Michael's Mount. There

they keep a lone vigil over his spirit which lingers, maybe, in that submerged mythical realm of Lyonesse so beloved of the poets.

XII.

A Herald of Revolt

George Douglas Brown

THE part played by Ayrshire in producing men of letters who have enriched considerably Scottish national literature cannot be too greatly emphasized. It is necessary to cite only three Ayrshire writers, from the districts of Cunningham and Kyle, who have added distinction to our literature—Robert Burns in the eighteenth century, John Galt from the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and George Douglas Brown from the middle of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, their lives thus bridging three centuries. These three Scottish writers had this much in common, that they came of humble birth and, oddly

enough, they were born within a few miles of each other—Burns was born at Alloway, near Ayr, in 1759; Galt was born at Irvine in 1779; and on 26th January, 1869, George Douglas Brown was born at Ochiltree. Brown remained at Ochiltree for four years, and from there he proceeded, in the company of his mother, to whom he was always fondly attached, to Duchray, in the parish of Coylton, thence to Cronberry, and the final years with his mother were spent at Crofthead, near Ayr. After eight years at Coylton parish school, Brown passed on first to Mr. Hyslop at Cronberry and then to Mr. Andrew at Ochiltree, and finally to Ayr Academy where he finished his commendable school career. From 1887 till 1891 he attended Glasgow University

where he gained the Eglinton Fellowship in 1890, and the Snell Exhibition Scholarship in 1891. Then he proceeded to Balliol College, Oxford, where he won first-class honours in "Mods," the intermediate examination. A brilliant scholarly career was in prospect for him, but the serious illness that had befallen his mother arrested his progress, and with filial love and devotion and, at the same time, with indomitable cheerfulness in submitting to the inevitable, he returned to his mother's bedside at Crofthead, where she died in 1895. In the same year Brown went to London. There he worked steadily at hack journalism, writing under various pseudonyms, but the one notable event of his later years was the publication in 1901 of his celebrated

novel, "The House with the Green Shutters."

To the roll of names that have become famous by one work, such as Blackmore by his "Lorna Doone," Emily Brontë by her "Wuthering Heights," and Shorthouse by his "John Inglesant," there should be added that of George Douglas Brown by his "The House with the Green Shutters." The first thing that strikes one in reading that book is, of course, its uncompromising realism, and in his frank picture of the ways and doings and talk of the inhabitants of a Scottish "nippy locality," as he calls it, he was a herald of revolt against that other, and perhaps less lifelike, view, seen through the rosy spectacles of the "kailyarders." Since his day he has had

many disciples in literature. While it may seem invidious to compare a novelist with a poet, nevertheless there is a similarity between Robert Burns and George Douglas Brown in their common spirit of revolt against what had become accepted conventions, though the objects of their attack were vastly different; in the one case the revolt was against narrow creeds, against cant and tyranny, and in the other the revolt was levelled chiefly against the mawkish sentimentalism of the "kailyard" school of Scottish novelists. Brown has also a resemblance to his other Ayrshire brother-in-letters. His realism is similar, in some respects, to the realism of Galt; for instance, in its clear grip of the limited area of life and character it depicts, and in its

precision and intensity in handling certain situations.

"The House with the Green Shutters" is a difficult book to criticize. The sense of impending tragedy is kept well in view from the opening, on a serene summer morning, to the time when Gourlay's son imbibes too freely on his return from the Bacchic roysterings in Edinburgh. The character of the brutal Gourlay is the masterpiece of the book. The tyranny and overweening vanity for his House with the Green Shutters of this bully, a dour bodie whom every one in the neighbourhood detests and fears, are ruthlessly observed. Gourlay "had made dogged scorn a principle of life," and prided himself that he could nearly kill a man "wi' a glower from his een." Only less successful are

the scenes of humorous gossip indulged in by the cronies of the village of Barbie; the character of Mrs. Gourlay, slatternly, long-suffering, and too inclined to spoil her son; the son, a sensitive boy who turns out to be a brag, a coward, and a misuser of what little gifts he possessed. Two of the finest descriptions in the novel occur in near sequence; first, when young Gourlay's spirits are sensibly depressed by the smell of varnish from the new school desks, and, secondly, when, playing truant from school, his mother hides him in a garret from his father's sight. In the garret "he could hear the pigeons *rooketty-cooing* on the roof, and every now and then a slithering sound, as they lost their footing on the slates and went sliding downward to the rones. But for that,

all was still, uncannily still. Once a zinc pail clanked in the yard, and he started with fear, wondering if that was his faither!" The chorus of villagers—Deacon Allardyce; Sandy Toddle; Drucken Wabster; the baker, an enthusiastic Burnsite who quotes the bard on all possible, and on as many impossible, occasions; Johnny Coe; and Tam Brodie, the cobbler—this chorus is introduced just as his quaint peasant choruses are introduced by Mr. Thomas Hardy in his novels, as a relief from the tragedy of the main theme. It becomes a necessary relief from the sinister tone that is so persistently prominent. The names of places and persons, like Tenshillingland, Irrendavie, Loranogie, and Templandmuir, have a true smack of the Ayrshire soil

about them. The end, the complete downfall of the tyrant of Barbie, is grim and terrible rather than gloomy. The atmosphere of Scottish rustic life and character is consistent all through, and the little vignette of the auctioneering at the cattle-market is vividly real. Yet even when all these things have been said in its favour, and they have no doubt contributed largely to the unique success of the book, to the critical mind there is somehow here and there a hiatus that breaks its cohesion and, on account of its overpowering brutality, a want of restraint in its dramatic crises. A later reading confirms my first impression that the novel is too brutal to be wholly artistic.

As a personality George Douglas Brown is remembered by those who knew him for

his great charity to all with whom he came in contact, and more especially for that unbounded affection for his mother that, no doubt, suggested the close "couthie" intimacy between the mother and son so sympathetically pictured in "The House with the Green Shutters." At the early age of thirty-three Brown died in London on 28th August, 1902. There is, indeed, sadness in the speculation as to how many other original works ("The House with the Green Shutters" was the precursor of the realism that has been adopted in contemporary Scottish fiction) might have come from the pen of this promising heir to fame, had he lived to be more than a "one-work" author. To be read and remembered by one acknowledged work, however, is a higher tribute than to lie

neglected and unread on the bookshelf in an edition of several volumes; and, certainly, when he broke with tradition, George Douglas Brown asserted once more that individuality of character and independence of mind which have been typical of not a few Scottish writers of yesterday and to-day.

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